

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 4, 2023

Joshua A. Gordon, M.D., Ph.D.  
Director  
National Institute of Mental Health  
6001 Executive Boulevard  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Director Gordon,

Throughout the United States, it is critical that we confront barriers that hinder successful reentry for people returning to their communities from carceral settings, including the negative mental health impacts caused by incarceration. We request the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) research post-traumatic prison disorder and share findings related to prevention and treatment.

Post-traumatic prison disorder, also referred to as post-incarceration syndrome, is an under-researched mental health condition uniquely experienced by individuals who have been confined in carceral settings, like jails, detention centers, and prisons, at the local, state, or federal level. While it shares characteristics similar to post-traumatic stress disorder, researchers consider it a distinct condition. Carceral environments are inherently damaging to people's mental health and can lead to long-term harms that persists even after release. The effects can range from anxiety to depression to suicidality. And when left untreated, individuals may develop unhealthy coping mechanisms, including substance use disorder. Much more research is needed.

Our national strategy to support people who are formerly incarcerated and end the cycle of mass incarceration must address post-traumatic prison disorder. Every year, more than 640,000 people are released from state and federal prisons. The status of their mental health is a major determinant of what happens next in their journey. Strengthening familial relationships, maintaining steady employment, and developing productive habits require a positive mental well-being. Thus, investing in the mental health of the formerly incarcerated population decreases the risk of recidivism and bolsters community safety.

NIMH has an important role to play in supporting the mental health of people transitioning from jails and prisons. By researching and publishing findings on post-traumatic prison disorder, your agency will inform how Congress, state and local governments, and community-based organizations respond to the complex needs of people who experience incarceration. We encourage you to work directly with formerly incarcerated people and engage stakeholders who are rooted in communities that are disproportionately impacted by incarceration.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress



Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress