

# Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

May 21, 2019

Dear Senators:

Disability Rights Nebraska is the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for Nebraskans with disabilities. The number of inmates in the correctional system with mental illness is significant and as such, correctional facilities at all levels need to be provided with the training, tools, and programming to adequately address the needs of this particular population. We are fully supportive of including in the state budget the funding for inmate programming originally, and as amended, proposed in LB 446.

Joe McKendry sums up our support in the [April 2018 issue](#) of the Atlantic magazine:

“Across the country, correctional facilities are struggling with the reality that they have become the nation’s de facto mental-health-care providers, although they are hopelessly ill-equipped for the job. In Michigan, for example, roughly half of all the people in county jails have a mental illness, and nearly a quarter of the people in state prisons do.”

This statement reflects findings from our [own literature review](#)—that inmates with mental illness are overrepresented at all correctional levels:

*Table 1 Estimated Proportion of Adults with Mental Health, Substance Use, and Co-occurring Disorders in U.S. Population and under Correctional Control and Supervision*

	General Public	State Prisons	Jails	Probation and Parole
Serious Mental Disorders	5.4%	16%	17%	7-9%
Substance Use Disorders (Alcohol and Drugs) — Abuse and/or Dependence	16%	53%	68%	35-40%
A Co-occurring Substance Use Disorder When Serious Mental Disorder Is Diagnosed	25%	59%	72%	49%
A Co-occurring Serious Mental Disorder When Substance Use disorder Is Diagnosed	14.4%	59.7%	33.3%	21%

The proposed funding is a good investment. We recommend it advance.

Sincerely,

Bradley A. Meurrens  
Public Policy Director