

# Bill would shift county prisoners' mental health costs to federal government



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An Alabama senator wants the federal government to cover most of the cost of caring for jail inmates with mental illnesses.

Sen. Cam Ward, an Alabaster Republican, said Tuesday that counties currently pay for detainees' psychiatric health care. He has introduced a bill that would shift 70 percent of those costs to the federal government under Medicaid.

The legislation would also allow county inmates to resume federal mental health care benefits immediately after release.

Right now, Medicaid coverage is terminated when a person enters a county jail. Ward says this creates a gap in coverage when inmates are discharged, causing those with mental illnesses to go weeks or months without medication.

The bill will move to the Judiciary Committee for a vote.

**Alabama and national politics.**

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