

As a dentist at the Suffolk County Jail, I have the great privilege of caring for many patients experiencing justice involvement or incarceration. Most of my patients enter the jail with staggering dental needs and a significant amount of pain. For a large many of these patients, I am able to inform them that MassHealth will cover a comprehensive array of dental services, because they are under the age of 21, and are considered to have pediatric coverage by MassHealth. While I am glad this provides them with additional dental and medical coverage, it is also heartbreaking to sit with these young patients in the dehumanizing and extremely adult setting of incarceration and inform them that while the state considers them adults in the criminal justice system, it simultaneously considers them children.

Within the medical system, these patients are children. It seems an unimaginable cruelty that for the purposes of punishment, they are considered adults. An Act Expanding Juvenile Court Jurisdiction and District Court Diversion and An Act to Promote Better Outcomes for Young People in the Commonwealth will help protect these vulnerable individuals whose brains continue to develop and lack the full decision-making capacity of adults. Incarceration represents a demonstrable harm in these individuals' health and well-being, that can negatively impact them for life. Recognizing these important cognitive differences in children and young adults will make a meaningful difference for the patients I care for, their families, and our community. Thank you for your consideration.

-Lisa Simon, DMD