<INSERT DATE>

Assemblymember Mark Stone

State Capitol, Room 3146

Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 45 (MARK STONE) - *Eliminating Copays in Prisons and Jails* - SUPPORT**

Dear Assemblymember Stone,

(Organization name) writes in strong support of AB 45 (Stone), which eliminates the copays for medical and dental services inside California prisons and jails. The copays discourage many people from seeking medical care until it is an emergency. This barrier to healthcare jeopardizes the health not just of those who are imprisoned and who work in prisons and jails, but also of the general public.

**(Add information about your organization and why eliminating copayments is important.)**

In order to see a doctor or dentist, people in prison must pay a $5 copay to initiate a visit. While this may not seem cumbersome, people in prison typically earn only $0.08 to $0.37 per hour. After paying 55% to restitution fees, most people receive only $1 to $6 per week. People incarcerated in most county jails must pay a $3 copay to initiate a visit, while earning no wages. Although people without the required funds are able to access care, a hold is placed on their account for 30 days in prison -- and as long as six months in jails -- after the healthcare visit, during which any income is withdrawn towards the copay. Medical debt then prevents people from being able to purchase needed items like over-the-counter medicine, basic toiletries, phone cards, stamps, and paper to maintain contact with family and loved ones.

People who are incarcerated are the most at-risk for chronic and infectious diseases due to crowding, malnutrition, stress, and trauma. Medical copays only serve to further existing problematic conditions. Charging copays creates a two-tiered system in which those with funds can access healthcare when needed, as opposed to those without funds who are forced to wait until minor issues become serious or life-threatening.

Fair and just access to healthcare is a human right. By eliminating medical and dental copays, California will move one step closer to improving public health. Further, AB 45 (Stone) will also remedy the racial inequities that serve as a barrier to equal access to healthcare.

Eight states currently don’t charge copays, including Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Vermont, and Wyoming. A number of California counties don’t charge copays, including San Francisco, Napa, Santa Clara, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Tulare. It is time for California to remove copays and ensure consistent, equal access to healthcare for all people in prison and jail.

For these reasons, (Organization name) strongly supports AB 45 (Mark Stone) and urges your support on this important bill.

Sincerely,

CC: Emily Harris, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (emily@ellabakercenter.org)

Keely O’Brien, Legislative Aide for Assemblymember Stone (keely.obrien@asm.ca.gov)