

February 9, 2024

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health,
Education Labor, and Pensions
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor, Pensions
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rogers
Chairwoman, House Committee on Energy
and Commerce
2188 Rayburn House Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Energy and Commerce
2107 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Sanders, Chairwoman Rogers, and Ranking Members Cassidy and Pallone,

On behalf of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, families, mental health and addiction providers, advocates and other stakeholders committed to strengthening access to high-quality mental and behavioral health care, we write to urge the Senate HELP and House Energy and Commerce Committees to reauthorize the *Substance Use Disorder Prevention That Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities Act* (SUPPORT Act) within the forthcoming floor package and include the Senate HELP Committee's additional provisions to maximize the investment into substance use and co-occurring mental health programs.

In 2021, the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) estimated that 44 million individuals in the United States reported having a substance use disorder (SUD).¹ Since the 2018 passage of SUPPORT Act, 13% of Americans have reported increasing or starting substance use as a way of coping with stress related to the pandemic,² and in 2023, overdose rates topped 112,000 for the first time in history, proving the importance of meeting the ever-changing needs of the American population.³ Overdose deaths among youth ages 10-19 increased 109% between 2019 and 2021, and deaths involving fentanyl increased 182%.⁴

However, substance use disorders and overdose do not occur in a vacuum. Up to 50% of those with substance use disorders also experience co-occurring mental health conditions,

¹ Ringeisen, H., Edlund, M., Guyer, H., Geiger, P., Stambaugh, L., Dever, J., Liao, D., Carr, C., Peytchev, A., Reed, W., McDaniel, K., & Smith, T. (2023). Mental and Substance Use Disorders Prevalence Study (MDPS): Findings Report. RTI International

² Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, (2020). MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020; 69:1049–1057.

³ Ahmad FB, Cisewski JA, Rossen LM, Sutton P. Provisional drug overdose death counts. National Center for Health Statistics. (2023).

⁴ Tanz LJ, Dinwiddie AT, Mattson CL, O'Donnell J, Davis NL. Drug Overdose Deaths Among Persons Aged 10–19 Years — United States, July 2019–December 2021. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2022; 71:1576–1582.

meaning substance use disorder and mental health are deeply intertwined.^{5,6} Best clinical practice is to integrate substance use treatment and co-occurring mental health treatment.⁷ Policies that integrate these co-occurring conditions provide the most cost effective and successful outcomes to battle the rising rates of both substance use disorder and behavioral health conditions. It is crucial to not only reauthorize, but also update and improve upon existing programs to address the surging rates of behavioral health conditions and overdose faced by the nation.^{8,9}

We applaud the work of both Chambers this past year and are supportive of the overlapping provisions for the SUPPORT Act reauthorization reported out by the HELP Committee and passed by the House of Representatives this past December. As the Committees work to negotiate the differing provisions between the Chambers, we urge the inclusion of the additional sections reported out by the HELP Committee to maximize the existing resources to address this surging epidemic, including the following provisions:

- **Sec. 106.** Donald J. Cohen National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative
- **Sec. 111.** Promoting State choice in PDMP systems
- **Sec. 112.** Protecting Suicide Prevention Lifeline from cybersecurity incidents
- **Sec. 113.** Bruce's Law: HHS launch campaign focused on dangers of drugs contaminated with fentanyl among youth
- **Sec. 114.** Guidance on at-home drug disposal systems
- **Sec. 203.** Regional centers of excellence in substance use disorder education
- **Sec. 207.** Development and dissemination of model training programs for substance use disorder patient records
- **Sec. 108.** Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences
- **Sec. 211.** HHS and DOL OIG review of required parity guidance to plans
- **Sec. 214.** Roundtable on using health information technology to improve mental health and substance use care outcomes
- **Sec. 215.** Peer-to-peer mental health support
- **Sec. 216.** Kid PROOF Act to provide parents with supplies to prevent overdose and suicide
- **Sec. 305.** CAREER Act to expands Ag's (RISE) grant program for rural community skills building
- **Sec. 307.** Office of Recovery¹⁰

We stand ready to serve as a resource if there are any questions. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

⁵ KFF Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, (2023).

⁶ SAMHSA. *Mental health and substance use co-occurring disorders.* (2023).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act of 2023. S. 3393, Sections 113, 114, 203, 207, 211, 305, 216, 118th Cong.* (2023).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act of 2023. S. 3393, Sections 113, 114, 203, 207, 211, 305, 216, 118th Cong.* (2023).

Sincerely,

American Art Therapy Association
American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Worker
American Association on Health and Disability
American Counseling Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Therapeutic Recreation Association
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Center for Law and Social Policy
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Workers Association
Crisis Residential Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Girls Inc.
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International OCD Foundation
Lakeshore Foundation

Legal Action Center

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Mental Health America

NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association for Childrens Behavioral Health

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

National Association of Social Workers

National Board for Certified Counselors

National Council for Mental Wellbeing

National Federation of Families

National League for Nursing

NHMH- No Health without Mental Health

Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health

Postpartum Support International

Psychotherapy Action Network

REDC Consortium

RI International

Sandy Hook Promise

SMART Recovery

The Kennedy Forum

The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

Trust for America's Health

Vibrant Emotional Health

Wounded Warrior Project

CC: Speaker Mike Johnson, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell