

June 21, 2021

The Honorable Paul Tonko
U.S. House of Representatives
2369 Rayburn House Office Building
Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Trone
U.S. House of Representatives
1213 Longworth House Office
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tina Smith
U.S. Senate
720 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
U.S. Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Tonko, Representative Trone, Senator Smith and Senator Stabenow,

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates and other stakeholders committed to strengthening Americans' access to mental health and substance use treatment, is writing to express our support for H.R. 3450/S. 1727, the Medicaid Bump Act. This vital and innovative legislation would incentivize states to expand coverage of behavioral health services, including mental health and substance use services, by providing a corresponding increase in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) matching rate to 90% for these services.

As the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently found, preexisting unmet needs for mental and behavioral health services were “worsened by new challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic,” including coping with the illness itself or its associated impacts on social isolation, job loss, or reliance on remote work and online education. As a result, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that an average of 38% of adults reported symptoms of anxiety or depression from April 2020 through February 2021, compared with only 11% a year and a half earlier. Children and adolescents are also experiencing mental health effects from the pandemic, including higher reported rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. An alarming number of children and adolescents are presenting to emergency departments in mental health crisis. CDC found that from April to October 2020, hospitals across the U.S. reported a 24% increase in the proportion of mental health emergency department visits for children ages 5 to 11, and a 31% increase for children and adolescents ages 12 to 17 compared to 2019.

Even more concerning, there is ample evidence showing the pandemic's impact on increasing rates of suicide attempts and substance use. SAMHSA data indicates that opioid-related deaths in some areas of the country during the pandemic were as much 50% higher than during the same period in 2019, while there is a resurgence in rates of abuse of other substances such as methamphetamine. CDC data likewise indicates that

emergency department visits attributable to suicide attempts and drug overdoses were 26% and 36% higher, respectively, for the period of mid-March through mid-October 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. Overall, the volume of calls to the Disaster Distress Hotline increased by 340% between March 2020 and February 2021, compared to the same period during the prior year.

Medicaid remains the single largest payor of behavioral health services for both adults and children, including mental health and substance use services, yet the unmet need for these services continues to outpace the program's current capacity, especially in light of an increased demand due to the pandemic. Many beneficiaries remain on long waitlists for mental and behavioral health services or languish for long periods of time in emergency rooms awaiting treatment. Many more reside in areas or communities that lack a sufficient workforce of mental and behavioral health professionals. The Medicaid Bump Act would provide a lifeline for states that choose to expand their Medicaid expenditures for mental health and substance use services, while ensuring that the additional funding must be used to supplement, and not replace, existing funding for these services.

Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic spotlighted deep-seated racial and ethnic disparities in health care, and behavioral health is no exception. While the data shows that rates of behavioral health disorders are fairly similar across demographics, Black and Latino populations have substantially lower access to mental health and substance abuse treatment. Given the existing barriers to care, individuals with mental and behavioral health needs in minority communities are even more vulnerable during the pandemic or other crises. The Medicaid Bump Act is a much-needed opportunity to address racial disparities in access to behavioral health care and treatment, and it would provide underserved communities with more resources to enhance programs that reach vulnerable populations.

The nation will continue to address the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic long after the end of the pandemic itself. As organizations leading the fight to address the increased demand for mental health and substance use services, MHLG would like to thank you for your leadership on this issue and for introducing this important bill that will offer robust funding for states that take a proactive approach to addressing the unmet need for mental and behavioral health services. Please let us know how our member-organizations can serve as a resource in advancing this critical piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association of Suicidology
American Association on Health and Disability
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychological Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Children's Hospital Association
Clinical Social Work Association
Centerstone
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Girls Inc.
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC)
International OCD Foundation
International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses
The Jewish Federations of North America
The Kennedy Forum
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
Mental Health America
Mom Congress
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Counties (NACo)
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability
Directors
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Disability Rights Network
National Federation of Families

National League for Nursing
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Nemours Children's Health
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
Postpartum Support International
Psychotherapy Action Network Advocacy
RI International
SMART Recovery
The Trevor Project
Treatment Communities of America
Well Being Trust

CC: Rep. Frank Pallone
Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Sen. Ron Wyden
Sen. Mike Crapo