

January 28, 2021

The Honorable Roy Blunt
United States Senate
135 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
U.S. House of Representatives
2358-B Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
U.S. House of Representatives
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Thank You For COVID-19 Behavioral Health Relief Package

Dear Senators Blunt and Murray and Reps. DeLauro and Cole:

On behalf of the undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), we are writing to express our sincere thanks for the bipartisan inclusion of **\$4.25 billion for mental health and substance use programs** above and beyond regular FY 2021 spending in the COVID-19 relief portion of the Consolidated Appropriations Act (CAA) of 2020. Given the behavioral health challenges that Americans continue to experience, the appropriation of these funds is desperately needed by states and front line providers to ensure the continued provision of crucial mental health and substance use services.

The CAA included a combined total of \$3.3 billion in additional appropriations for both the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant and the Mental Health Block Grant, as well as \$600 million in Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) expansion grants. Additionally, suicide prevention programs, minority fellowships, Project AWARE funding targeting school systems, emergency funding for states, and additional allocations to Native American tribes overseen by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) all received significant increases.

Emerging data make clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated both the mental health and substance use crises. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Center for Health Statistics reported that 81,230 people died of drug overdoses in the 12-month period ending in May 2020 – the largest number of drug overdoses ever recorded in a single year.¹ Overdose-related cardiac arrests spiked in April 2020, accounting for 74% of every 100,000 emergency calls nationally – a 20% increase – according to recent research from the *Journal of the American Medical Association Psychiatry*.² Strikingly, a September report issued by the Well Being Trust estimated 150,000 “deaths of despair” during the pandemic were primarily attributable to drug and alcohol abuse, and completed suicides were directly linked to the social isolation and dislocation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.³ Mental Health America reports a 200 percent increase in the number of people screening “at risk” for moderate to severe depression and anxiety, and a nearly 250 percent increase in the number of people reporting frequent suicidal ideation over 2019 results.⁴

¹ <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/2020/han00438.asp>

² <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2773768>

³ https://wellbeingtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/WBT_Deaths-of-Despair_COVID-19-FINAL-FINAL.pdf

⁴ <https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools>

Further, the CAA funding arrives at a critical juncture for front line behavioral health providers. A field survey conducted by the National Council for Behavioral Health shows that community-based mental health and/or substance use organizations have experienced total revenue losses ranging from 23% to 28% since mid-March 2020.⁵ *The New York Times* cited a similar survey of 165 treatment centers conducted by the National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers that found that 43% had to reduce capacity and “10% had to shut down because of the pandemic.”⁶ At a time of significant financial hardship for mental health and/or substance use providers, the CAA funding is a welcomed and critical financing vehicle for rebuilding the treatment capacity to meet the increasing needs of our nation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The members of the Mental Health Liaison Group will gladly be a resource to you if needed to ensure that these desperately needed emergency funds are rapidly allocated to states and communities. Again, our sincere thanks for the bipartisan leadership you have demonstrated in expanding access to behavioral health care for Americans with mental health and substance use disorders at a moment of crisis nationwide.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

*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 Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Centerstone*
Clinical Social Work Association
Clinical Social Work Association
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Education Development Center*
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
International OCD Foundation
International Society of Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses*
The Jewish Federations of North America*

*Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
Mental Health America
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health &
Developmental Disability Directors
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders*
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Federation of Families
National Health Care for the Homeless Council*
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Postpartum Support International
Psychotherapy Action Network
REDC Consortium
RI International, Inc.
Sandy Hook Promise
School Social Work Association of America
SMART Recovery
The Trevor Project
Well Being Trust*

** Denotes Affiliate Member*

⁵ <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/press-releases/demand-for-mental-health-and-addiction-services-increasing-as-covid-19-pandemic-continues-to-threaten-availability-of-treatment-options/>

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/04/nyregion/addiction-treatment-coronavirus-new-york-new-jersey.html>