December 9, 2025

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Thune
Senate Majority Leader
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
House Minority Leader
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
1129 House Office Building
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

RE: MHLG Urges Passage of the *Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act* (S. 1816/H.R. 3514).

Dear Speaker Johnson, Leaders Thune, Jeffries, and Schumer,

On behalf of the undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and substance use treatment providers, advocates, and payers committed to strengthening access to mental health and substance use care, we write to express our strong support for and endorsement of the *Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act* (S. 1816/H.R. 3514). This bipartisan legislation will help ensure that older adults can access the timely mental health and substance use treatment they need by streamlining prior authorization processes in Medicare Advantage.

In 2022, an estimated one in eight older adults experienced a mental illness and one in 11 had a substance use disorder.[1] Despite being widespread, mental illness often goes underdiagnosed and undertreated among older adults. This population faces heightened risks due to factors such as the loss of loved ones, loneliness and social isolation, chronic illness or disability, and the stress associated with caregiving. Furthermore, barriers such as stigma, financial constraints, limited transportation, and challenges navigating the health care system can make it difficult for older adults to access the care they need.

Prior authorization use has been historically higher in Medicare Advantage than in Traditional Fee-for-Service (FFS) Medicare. In 2023, Medicare Advantage insurers made nearly 50 million prior authorization determinations, compared to fewer than 400,000 in Traditional FFS.[2] These requirements can create significant barriers to timely mental health and substance use treatment, leading to delayed care, interrupted treatment continuity, or patients forgoing care altogether. Such delays can result in worsening symptoms, increased risk of crisis or hospitalization, and greater strain on families and

[1] See Behavioral Health among Older Adults: Results from the 2021 and 2022 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health
[2] See Medicare Advantage Insurers Made Nearly 50 Million Prior Authorization Determinations in 2023 | KFF

caregivers. When individuals cannot access mental health care when it is needed, conditions that could be effectively managed early often escalate, undermining recovery, independence, and quality of life while ultimately increasing overall health care costs.

Mental health and substance use providers are similarly burdened. Because of onerous prior authorization requirements, clinicians, counselors, and support staff must spend more time navigating paperwork and less time providing care—an especially serious concern given the nationwide shortage of mental health professionals. Over time, these administrative pressures contribute to burnout, workforce attrition, and reduced access to care, undermining the capacity of the mental health system to meet growing community needs.

The *Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act* (S. 1816/H.R. 3514) is bipartisan, bicameral legislation that would modernize the prior authorization process by establishing clear timelines, greater transparency, and electronic standards. Enacting this bill would ensure that Medicare beneficiaries can access timely mental health and substance use treatment without harmful delays, while allowing behavioral health providers to devote more time to patient care and less to administrative burdens.

Accordingly, we respectfully urge the House Ways and Means and Energy and Commerce Committees to advance this legislation through their respective committees and for both chambers to prioritize its inclusion in any moving legislative vehicle to ensure timely access to care for Medicare beneficiaries.

We welcome the opportunity to work with you to ensure that older adults and individuals with mental health and substance use conditions can receive the care they need without harmful delays. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) Members

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 Psychiatric Pharmacists
American Association on Health and Disability
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association Services
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
Huntington's Disease Society of America
Inseparable
International OCD Foundation
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Board for Certified Counselors
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Eating Disorders Association
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
NHMH - No Health without Mental Health
Psychotherapy Action Network
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
Tourette Association of America

cc

Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Brett Guthrie and Ranking Member Frank Pallone
Ways and Means Committee Chair Jason Smith and Ranking Member Richard Neal
Finance Committee Chair Mike Crapo and Ranking Member Ron Wyden
The GOP Doctors Caucus Representatives Greg Murphy, John Joyce, Brian Babin, Buddy Carter, Scott DesJarlais, Neal Dunn, Andy Harris, Diana Harshbarger, Ronny Jackson, Mike Kennedy, Richard McCormick, Mariannette Miller-Meeks, Bob Onder, and Jeff Van Drew
The Democratic Doctors Caucus Representatives Ami Bera, Herb Conaway, Kelly Morrison, Kim Schrier, Maxine Dexter, and Raul Ruiz
Bill Sponsors Senators Roger Marshall, MD, and Mark Warner, and Representatives Mike Kelly, Suzan DelBene, John Joyce, MD, and Ami Bera, MD