

Mental Health Liaison Group

January 20, 2016

The Honorable Roy Blunt
United States Senate
260 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
United States Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Leonard Lance
US House of Representatives
2352 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Doris Matsui
US House of Representatives
2311 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Blunt and Stabenow and Representatives Lance and Matsui:

The undersigned national mental health and substance use disorder organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group are writing today to thank you for your leadership in authoring legislation to expand the Certified Community Behavioral Health Center demonstration program authorized in Section 223 of the Protecting Access to Medicare Act that is based on your Excellence in Mental Health Act. The expansion of the two-year demonstration project to all 24 states that have received planning grant funds will help increase access to critical behavioral health services for thousands of people, including active duty military personnel, veterans, and their families.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the public mental health system currently serves less than half of people in the United States with conditions like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major clinical depression. The lack of ready access to behavioral health services has a profound impact across American life. Two-thirds of inmates in our jails and prisons meet the criteria for a substance use disorder. Law enforcement agencies consistently report increasing encounters with individuals experiencing acute psychiatric symptoms – leading directly to a “boarding” crisis in community hospital emergency rooms in cities large and small.

Twenty-four states in the South, the Northeast, the Midwest and the West Coast, urban and rural, Red and Blues states, all applied for the chance to expand access to community-based addiction and mental health care for the more than 750,000 uninsured and low-income Americans with the most serious and persistent mental health conditions, including 100,000 returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. Your legislation will ensure that each state realizes this incredible opportunity, offering care and treatment for millions in need.

Thank you for your outstanding support and continued dedication to millions of Americans living with mental illness and addictions. The Mental Health Liaison Group pledges to fight side-by-side with you to ensure the passage of this important legislation.

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Laurel Stine, J.D., American Psychological Association at lstine@apa.org
and Debbie Plotnick, MSS, MLSP, Mental Health America at dplotnick@mentalhealthamerica.net

Sincerely,

American Art Therapy Association
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)
American Association on Health and Disability*
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Clinical Social Work Association
Coalition for Supporting Housing
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition
Families USA
First Focus Campaign for Children
The Jewish Federations of North America
Legal Action Center
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Association of Counties*
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD)
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Disability Rights Network
No Health without Mental Health
School Social Work Association of America
Treatment Communities of America

**MHLG Observer*