

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health,  
Education, Labor & Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on  
Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

On behalf of the undersigned mental health and substance use disorder organizations, we write in support of Senators Tina Smith (D-MN) and Lisa Murkowski's (R-AK) bills, *Emergency Support for Substance Use Disorders Act* and *COVID-19 Behavioral Health Support Act*, and Senator Smith's *Emergency Mental Health and Substance Use Technical Assistance Act*. These important pieces of legislation will aid behavioral health needs during the COVID-19 pandemic through resources to providers, increased awareness and prevention activities, and training and technical assistance. Specifically, the *Emergency Support for Substance Use Disorders Act* will provide grants to combat substance use issues during COVID-19 and the *COVID-19 Behavioral Health Support Act* will establish grants for behavioral health needs caused by COVID-19. Last, the *Emergency Mental Health and Substance Use Technical Assistance Act* amends the Public Health Service Act to create a center called the Emergency Mental Health and Substance Use Training and Technical Assistance Center.

Recent research has shown that COVID-19 has caused and will continue to cause an increase in behaviors related to mental health and suicidal ideations.<sup>1</sup> According to a recent report from the Well Being Trust,<sup>2</sup> there will be an estimated 75,000 additional deaths by despair associated with COVID-19. Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, deaths from alcoholism, drugs, and suicide in the United States were already at record high levels. Additionally, recent initial research findings around COVID-19 have shown that eating disorders behaviors are rising, with Americans affected by the serious mental illness being more concerned about relapse and the effects on their mental health than COVID-19 itself.<sup>3</sup> However, it is possible to take action to prevent deaths of despair from reaching this number.

The inclusion of the *Emergency Support for Substance Use Disorders Act*, *COVID-19 Behavioral Health Support Act*, and *Emergency Mental Health and Substance Use Technical Assistance Act*, as well as other mental health and substance use disorder relief efforts from the HEROES Act, we can ensure that we come out of the current pandemic ready to navigate any future behavioral health care needs. As such, we urge you to include Senator Smith and Senator Murkowski's *Emergency Support for Substance Use Disorders Act*, *COVID-19 Behavioral Health Support Act*, and *Emergency Mental Health and Substance Use Technical Assistance Act* in the next COVID-19 relief package.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

<sup>1</sup> Gunnell, D.; Appleby, L.; Arensman, E.; Hawton, K.; John, A.; Kapur, N. ... Pirkis, J. (April 21, 2020). Suicide Risk and prevention during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The lancet psychiatry*. Retrieved from [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(20\)30171-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(20)30171-1/fulltext)

<sup>2</sup> Patterson, S., Westfall, J. M., & Miller, B. F. (May 8, 2020). Projected Deaths of Despair During COVID-19. *Well Being Trust*. Retrieved from <https://wellbeingtrust.org/areas-of-focus/policy-and-advocacy/reports/projected-deaths-of-despair-during-covid-19/>

<sup>3</sup> Borg, Stina; Bulik, Cynthia M.; Flatt, Rachael E.; Harper, Lauren E.; MacDermod, Casey M.; Peat, Christine M.; Termorshuizen, Jet D.; Thornton, Laura M.; Watson, Hunna J. (June 8, 2020). Early Impact of COVID-19 on Individuals with Eating Disorders: A survey of ~1000 Individuals in the United States and the Netherlands. *medRxiv: The Preprint Server for Health Sciences*. Retrieved from <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.05.28.20116301v2>

American Art Therapy Association  
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Association of Suicidology  
American Counseling Association  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Psychological Association  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Centerstone  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Clinical Social Work Association  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice  
Inseparable, Inc.  
International OCD Foundation  
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance  
NAADAC, Association for Addiction Professionals  
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors and Development Disability Directors  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Council for Behavioral Health  
National Eating Disorders Association  
National League for Nursing  
National Register of Health Service Psychologists  
Postpartum Support International  
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium  
Schizophrenia And Related Disorders Alliance of America  
SMART Recovery  
The Trevor Project  
Treatment Communities of America