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. According to a recent report from the Well Being Trust, 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. 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

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