

March 15, 2013

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

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

Dear Senators Stabenow and Blunt:

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 the Excellence in Mental Health Act. This bill is critical to protecting and expanding our nation's community mental health and addictions system through the creation of Federally Qualified Behavioral Health Centers (FQBHCs).

As organizations that advocate tirelessly for improved services for Americans living with mental illness and addictions, we have long recognized the challenges facing community behavioral health providers as they seek to meet the growing need for treatment services. Each year, 1 in 5 Americans experiences a mental health or substance use disorder, according to data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The individuals served by community providers tend to have poorer health than the broader population, with a higher prevalence of chronic illness, a higher incidence of catastrophic health events, and a higher prevalence of serious mental illness, substance abuse and co-occurring chronic health conditions. Yet, federal payment models and regulatory structures have not kept pace with the growing demand for community services. Meanwhile, steadily decreasing state funding streams are putting pressure on community providers to lower costs and produce savings for the healthcare system. The result is that mental health and addiction providers struggle to meet the need for care, while individuals who cannot access care often see their conditions deteriorate, in many cases ending up in the emergency department or the criminal justice system after a mental health crisis.

We need a better way to address mental illness and addictions in the U.S. – a solution that builds strong community treatment networks, supports individuals who are trying to change their lives, and preserves public health and safety. The Excellence in Mental Health Act (S. 264) would bolster our nation's community mental health and addictions system, providing new support for integrated and simplified treatment that will improve Americans' health and lower costs for the federal and state governments.

The Excellence in Mental Health Act sets forth national criteria for the certification of community-based mental health and addiction providers. This critically important provision also establishes FQBHCs as co-equal components of America's safety net along with public hospitals, rural health clinics and Community Health Centers. This legislation will provide critical resources and support to behavioral health safety net organizations as they serve our nation's most vulnerable individuals – people with serious mental illnesses.

We cannot begin to address the unfolding crisis in the behavioral health system without both increased accountability and resources. Thank you for your leadership in addressing this critical issue.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association on Health and Disability*
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation
American Counseling Association
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 Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Child Welfare League of America*
Clinical Social Work Association
Clinical Social Work Guild
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
The Jewish Federations of North America
Mental Health America
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
School Social Work Association of America
United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association
Witness Justice
* Observing member