



**Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance**

April 6, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
1236 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Leader  
United States Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
2468 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer, Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leaders McConnell, Schumer and McCarthy,

As you are keenly aware, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will result in serious mental or emotional distress for individuals and communities, which can in turn create new or exacerbate current mental health concerns. Peer-led support groups have been shown to be extremely beneficial as part of regular care and during the pandemic could provide an essential link to care for millions of Americans. Given your leadership to expand access to peer support, I am requesting your support to provide funding to expand access to virtual peer support. Doing so will lessen the burden on the traditional health care system and help millions of Americans remain healthy and out of Emergency Departments (ED).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the President has issued guidance recommending that individuals self-isolate for at least two full weeks if they have been exposed to or are experiencing symptoms of the virus, and to cancel or postpone gatherings of 10 or more people. For those with higher risk of infection, individuals are advised to stay home as much as possible. At this time, all but essential business operations have been closed throughout the nation with the guidance having been extended until April 30, 2020. The sequence of events in other countries affected by the virus indicates that social distancing can aid in slowing the spread of the virus and is a vital precaution to take to protect public health. However, physical distancing, along with the consequences of the widespread closures, are having a profound impact on the mental health of individuals—increasing feelings of isolation and removing access to certain key factors of an individual’s wellness or treatment plan. Promptly funding and providing virtual community-based peers support can help individuals mitigate negative outcomes.

**THE DEPRESSION AND BIPOLAR SUPPORT ALLIANCE**

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) is the leading peer-focused mental health organization whose mission is to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders. DBSA national supports more than 500 local support groups and approximately 180 local affiliate chapters reaching over four million individuals with support, educational resources, and tools to help individuals living with

mood disorders lead productive and fulfilling lives. DBSA is nationally recognized for our peer support specialist training services, our mental health advocacy work, our expansive peer support network, and as an expert on the subject of mood disorders. Our strong support of the Veteran community is demonstrated in our leadership to provide the Veterans Administration (VA) nationally recognized Veteran peer support specialist training and advocating for the PEER Act, which now enables peer support specialists to be employed at VA medical facilities in addition to the behavioral health facilities.

In addition to the 500 local, community-based support group meetings, DBSA offers numerous online support groups, but the demand is high and continues to grow rapidly in the wake of COVID-19. In the past three weeks we have seen registrations for these groups double and the wait lists grow by 166%.

**Federal funding for immediate implementation of English and Spanish language virtual community-based peer support services will provide immediate relief for people living with mental health conditions including Veterans, seniors, and parents and caregivers of people living with mental health conditions.**

To ensure that DBSA can meet the needs of Americans across our country and transition to a virtual platform, DBSA requires \$710,000 to be used immediately in the following manner:

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| • Technology to transition DBSA existing in person groups to online support groups                                   | \$108,000 |
| • Provide new English and Spanish language online support groups targeting Veterans, seniors, parents and caregivers | \$80,000  |
| • Provide one on-one peer support to support group participants  | \$65,000  |
| • Build the certified peer support specialist workforce to execute the program                                       | \$75,000  |
| • Increase support to the community through webinars and podcasts  | \$75,000  |
| • Research to demonstrate efficacy of peer support   | \$100,000 |
| • Staffing and administrative needs to execute for one year  | \$207,000 |

I sincerely hope you will work with DBSA to ensure that peer support remains a critical component of the COVID-19 response. I look forward to hearing from you about how Congress can continue to support our work. Should you or your staff need to reach me, please do not hesitate to reach out via phone at (312) 988-1179 or email at [mpollock@dbsalliance.org](mailto:mpollock@dbsalliance.org).

With gratitude,



Michael Pollock  
Chief Executive Officer  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance