

June 5, 2015

The Honorable Tim Murphy  
2332 Rayburn House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson  
2468 Rayburn House Office Building  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Murphy and Johnson:

On behalf of the National Council for Behavioral Health, I am writing to express our gratitude for your continued focus on raising the national profile of important mental health and addiction treatment issues. Your legislation, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act (H.R. 2646) includes many important provisions that will support mental health and addiction treatment providers and the individuals they serve.

In particular, we applaud your inclusion of Section 701, based on the Behavioral Health Information Technology Act, the legislation you have tirelessly championed over several sessions of Congress. Extending federal health IT incentive payments to mental health and addiction treatment providers will go a long way toward helping our nation's health care providers offer high-quality, fully coordinated services.

We are also grateful for your inclusion of Section 505, which extends the bipartisan Excellence in Mental Health Act demonstration program by two years and two states. This extension to the demonstration program will make an enormous contribution to expanding access to evidence-based community healthcare for children and adults with serious and persistent mental illnesses. It will support states and providers in reducing high hospital emergency room utilization among persons living with behavioral health conditions while easing the burden on hard-pressed law enforcement agencies in urban and rural areas. Perhaps most importantly, the Excellence Act demonstration will assist the Veterans Administration (VA) with serving the young men and women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with service connected mental disorders including clinical depression and PTSD.

In addition, we thank you for the inclusion of several long-sought priorities in your legislation, such as clarifying that providers may bill Medicaid for mental and physical health services provided on the same day; codifying the Medicare Six Protected Classes policy; strengthening parity enforcement; modifying inpatient psychiatric hospital discharge planning to ensure better coordination with outpatient providers, authorizing grants for crisis intervention trainings for law enforcement officers, and authorizing grants for mental health education and awareness in educational settings.

We welcome this opportunity to continue our nation's dialogue around the pressing issues of improving access to mental health and addiction care. We look forward to working with you and the diverse stakeholders in the behavioral health field to advance legislation that will save lives and improve health outcomes.

Sincerely,



Linda Rosenberg, MSW  
President and CEO  
National Council for Behavioral Health