

February 4, 2021

The Honorable Mike Thompson
United States House of Representatives
268 Cannon Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Katko
United States House of Representatives
2428 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Thompson and Katko,

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) - a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates, and other stakeholders - is writing to express our support and appreciation for your authoring and introduction of the Mental Health Access Improvement Act (H.R. 432). This legislation will allow licensed mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists to bill Medicare for medically necessary behavioral health services, providing a significant infusion of needed professionals to our nation's mental health workforce.

Mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists comprise 40% of the mental health workforce and are licensed to provide medically necessary behavioral health services in every state. The Bipartisan Policy Center's (BPC) Rural Health Task Force released a report in June 2020 recommending that these two professionals be added to the list of Medicare providers as a method of increasing access to care.¹ The BPC highlighted how the report's policy recommendations offer solutions to the challenges raised by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the National Academy of Medicine, older adults are consistently underserved when it comes to behavioral health care.² In treating COVID-19, this is no different. The CDC and *The Lancet* medical journal both report that older adults are at an elevated risk of hospitalization and admission to an intensive care unit due to COVID-19. Moreover, roughly four out of five COVID-19 deaths are people who are 65 or older based on emerging CDC data.³ The increased risk of hospitalization and death, coupled with the intense social isolation resulting from extended stay-at-home orders, are creating a behavioral health crisis among the Medicare population.

H.R. 432 will significantly increase our nation's mental health workforce and provide needed relief to older Americans in need of mental health services. The MHLG thanks you for your leadership and efforts to introduce this important legislation at this crucial time.

Sincerely,

*American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Suicidology
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association*

¹ <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/confronting-rural-americas-health-care-crisis/>

² <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/13400/the-mental-health-and-substance-use-workforce-for-older-adults>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/older-adults.html>

American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Bazon Center for Mental Health Law
Centerstone
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
*Families USA**
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International OCD Foundation
*International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses**
The Jewish Federations of North America
The Kennedy Forum
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
Mental Health America
Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Board for Certified Counselors
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National League for Nursing
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium
RI International
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America
SMART Recovery
The Trevor Project

* Denotes Affiliate Member