

December 20, 2018

The Honorable Kamala Harris  
112 Hart Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Harris:

The undersigned national organizations dedicated to strengthening Americans' access to mental health care write to extend our strong support for the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act (S. 3796). This legislation is a vital step in addressing our nation's dire shortage of mental health professionals and reducing the unmet mental health treatment gap for Americans across the lifespan.

The prevalence of mental health and substance use disorders in the United States is alarming. According to the National Institutes of Mental Health, in the past year alone nearly one in five adults in the United States experienced a mental or behavioral health problem. In addition, data indicate approximately 21% of youth aged 13-18 experiences a severe mental disorder at some point in their life; for children aged 8-15, the estimate is 13%. Untreated mental health disorders can lead to a host of adverse consequences, including homelessness, academic failure, unemployment, contact with the criminal or juvenile justice system, and suicide. With approximately 105.7 million Americans currently living in federally designated mental health professional shortage areas, it is paramount to provide access to timely, appropriate, and effective mental health treatment to help individuals with mental and behavioral health conditions obtain the services they need to thrive.

As you know, there is a severe shortage of mental health professionals across almost all specialties, particularly in rural areas. A 2016 report from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) projected the supply of personnel in selected behavioral and mental health fields to be 250,000 workers short of the projected demand in 2025. Currently, every state faces a shortage of child and adolescent psychiatrists, with the current shortage estimated at over 20,000. Further, projections from HRSA indicate that with the increasing demand for psychological services, the current shortage of psychologists is expected to become larger — with a shortage of approximately 58,000 psychologists by 2025. Those same projections forecast a shortage of nearly 27,000

mental health counselors by 2025. Finally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics says there is a need for 16% more social workers, or 109,000, by 2025.

We applaud your goal of building a robust mental and behavioral health workforce and look forward to working with you and your colleagues to pass the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act.

Sincerely,

American Art Therapy Association  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Counseling Association  
American Dance Therapy Association  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Psychological Association  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice  
Center for Clinical Social Work  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder  
Cities Thrive Coalition  
Clinical Social Work Association  
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists  
Council on Social Work Education  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice  
Mental Health America  
NAMI- National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

National Association for Behavioral Healthcare  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability  
Directors  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Board for Certified Counselors  
National Council for Behavioral Health  
National Eating Disorders Association  
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
National League for Nursing  
National Register of Health Service Psychologists  
NHMH- No Health without Mental Health  
Psychotherapy Action Network  
School Social Work Association of America  
SMART Recovery USA  
The International OCD Foundation  
The Kennedy Forum  
The Trevor Project  
Treatment Communities of America  
2020 Mom