

April 13, 2021

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

The Honorable Grace F. Napolitano
United States House of Representatives
1610 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Katko and Napolitano:

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 of 2021. This bill takes a vital step toward addressing our nation's dire shortage of mental health professionals and reducing the unmet mental health treatment gap for Americans across the lifespan, that has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The prevalence of mental health and substance use disorders in the United States was alarming before the added stressors of the pandemic. In 2019, nearly 1 in 5 American adults had a mental illness¹ and more than 20 million had a substance use disorder.² Emerging data on the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic show disturbing trends, including an increase in symptoms of anxiety and depression, suicidal ideation, and substance use.³ Children and adolescents are experiencing adverse mental health impacts as well, with CDC reporting an increase in the proportion of emergency room visits that are mental health related for children ages 5-17.⁴ All of these concerns are increased among BIPOC populations, where disparities in health care, including for mental and behavioral health, existed prior to the pandemic.⁵ Due in part to the shortage of mental health professionals, many children, adolescents, and adults continue to go without needed, potentially life-saving, equitable mental health care.

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. Unfortunately, there are serious shortages of mental health professionals across almost all specialties. 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 2025.⁶ Beyond the provider shortages overall, accessing mental health care is even more difficult for the approximately 122 million Americans currently living in federally-designated mental health professional shortage areas, often in rural and tribal

¹ <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>

² <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/release/2019-national-survey-drug-use-and-health-nsduh-releases>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7005a3.htm>

⁶ <https://bhwa.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/data-research/behavioral-health-2013-2025.pdf>

communities.⁷

As the need for mental health services continues to grow due to the impacts of COVID-19, it is paramount to provide equitable access to timely, appropriate, and effective treatment to help individuals with mental and behavioral health conditions obtain the services they need to thrive. We applaud your goals of building a robust mental and behavioral health workforce across professions and incentivizing mental health professionals to practice in underserved communities. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to pass the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act of 2021.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association of Suicidology
American Counseling Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Children's Hospital Association
Clinical Social Work Association
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
International OCD Foundation
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
NACBHDD and NARMH
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Counties
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

⁷ <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>

National Council for Behavioral Health
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Federation of Families
National League for Nursing
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Postpartum Support International
Psychotherapy Action Network Advocacy
REDC Consortium
RI International, Inc.
SMART Recovery
The Kennedy Forum
Trust for America's Health
Wounded Warrior Project

April 13, 2021

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tina Smith
United States Senate
720 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Murkowski and Smith:

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