March 11, 2011

The Honorable Fortney Pete Stark
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC  20515

Dear Representative Stark:

The undersigned organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group strongly support the “Medicare Mental Health Modernization Act of 2011.”

Despite the fact that effective treatments exist, Medicare’s current mental health benefit is not meeting the treatment needs of the millions of beneficiaries suffering from mental and emotional disorders. As representatives of the mental health community, we are heartened by your proposal to address these deficiencies.

There are numerous shortcomings in current Medicare policy that negatively affect beneficiaries requiring mental health treatment. Medicare beneficiaries continue to face inequitable coinsurance for outpatient mental health treatment as compared to the cost for other outpatient services (20%). Coverage of inpatient services in psychiatric facilities is capped at 190 days per a beneficiary’s lifetime. Medicare does not cover such important community-based services as psychiatric rehabilitation and intensive case management or service settings such as crisis residential programs, therapeutic family or group treatment homes, and residential detoxification and substance abuse treatment centers. Additionally, Medicare’s coverage of core mental health professionals is limited, reducing beneficiaries’ choice of provider and access to care. The unfortunate result is that most Medicare beneficiaries in need of mental health treatment are not seen by a mental health specialist.

Your legislation helps address all of these issues, and its enactment would make a dramatic difference in the lives of Medicare beneficiaries with mental disorders. Research has given us an unprecedented arsenal of effective treatments for mental and emotional disorders. Today, mental illnesses are as treatable as other general medical conditions. These treatments must be made available. Policymakers must take action to end the discriminatory policies in place -- in the Medicare program and elsewhere -- which work against individuals with these disorders.
We commend you for your ongoing dedication to ensuring Americans have adequate access to effective mental health treatments, and we look forward to working with you to secure the ultimate enactment of these provisions affecting Medicare beneficiaries with mental health needs.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association of Practicing Psychiatrists
American Association on Health and Disability *
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention/SPAN USA
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists *
Center for Integrated Behavioral Health Policy *
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies *
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
The Jewish Federations of North America
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Children’s Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders -- ANAD
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Council on Problem Gambling
National Disability Rights Network
National Foundation for Mental Health *
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America *
Therapeutic Communities of America
Tourette Syndrome Association
U.S. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

* Not a MHLG member