

Mental Health Liaison Group

May 20, 2010

Honorable Henry A. Waxman
Chairman
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Joe L. Barton
Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Waxman and Ranking Member Barton:

On behalf of the millions of Americans living with mental and substance use disorders, their families, and communities, the undersigned organizations write today in strong support of H.R. 5040, the Health Information Technology Extension for Behavioral Health Services Act of 2010, a bill to extend the meaningful use incentives established through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to mental health and substance abuse providers and facilities. We are requesting a hearing on the legislation before the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides \$20 billion in incentives and grants to healthcare providers and hospitals to establish interoperable electronic health record (EHR) systems throughout the nation. These benefits are extended to most physicians, chiropractors, dentists, optometrists, podiatrists and most hospitals. However, an important sector of the healthcare community is excluded-psychiatric hospitals, substance use treatment facilities and mental health treatment facilities, clinical psychologists, and clinical social workers.

The ultimate goal of widespread adoption of health information technology - to save American lives through improved coordination of care - is particularly relevant to persons with mental and addictive disorders. Recent studies have revealed that persons with serious mental illness in the public mental health system die sooner than other Americans, and have an average age of death at 52. Health information technology (HIT) is the essential cornerstone of efforts to address this emerging public health crisis. HIT will enable behavioral health and substance abuse providers to effectively coordinate care across mental health and substance abuse service systems, primary care entities and specialty medicine.

The Health Information Technology Extension for Behavioral Health Services Act of 2010 would make important changes to Medicare and Medicaid to ensure that the incentives provided through ARRA for the meaningful use of electronic medical records would allow for these mental health and substance use providers, hospitals, and facilities to be on par with the rest of the nation in regards to the electronic exchange of health information and as a result improve the health and safety of all patients.

Thank you for consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention/SPAN USA
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Clinical Social Work/ABE
Center for Integrated Behavioral Health Policy *
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU
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 Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Counties *
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 Coalition for Mental Health Recovery
National Council on Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Foundation for Mental Health
Therapeutic Communities of America
Tourette Syndrome Association
United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

* not a MHLG member