

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