June 5, 2019

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Alexander and Murray,

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), representing consumers, families, providers, and organizations advocating to strengthen access to high-quality mental and behavioral health care, strongly supports the Mental Health Parity Compliance Act of 2019, which Senators Murphy and Cassidy plan to introduce shortly. This bipartisan approach to promoting transparency and compliance with Federal parity requirements is critical for individuals living with mental illnesses and substance use disorders. We encourage the Committee to move this legislation expeditiously upon its introduction and to include it in the bipartisan legislation you are developing to reduce health care costs.

The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (Federal parity law), which passed more than ten years ago was designed to make insurance coverage for mental health and substance use disorder treatment no more restrictive than insurance coverage for any other medical condition. Unfortunately, more than a decade after the law was enacted, health plans and insurers generally are not yet meeting the requirements of the law that govern how they design and apply their managed care practices for mental health and substance use services. The Mental Health Parity Compliance Act fosters transparency and accountability, to ensure that health plans complying with the Federal parity law and that those confronting mental illness have equal access and coverage of needed mental health and behavioral health services. For far too long, individuals and their families have endured barriers to mental health and substance use disorder treatment that are likely more restrictive than those in place for other medical care. It is incredibly difficult for those confronting mental illness and their families to know if plans are complying with the law, given its complexity and the inherent challenge in trying to compare how mental health and substance use disorder coverage matches up with other medical coverage. Therefore, the legislation provides a needed process that requires transparency and accountability in how plans design coverage for mental health and substance use services and if that coverage is in accordance with federal law.

We have seen a dramatic rise in deaths resulting from the opioid epidemic and suicide crisis. This legislation will help ensure that patients have equal access and
coverage to mental health and substance use services, as required under current law.

MHLG thanks you again for your bipartisan efforts to improving health care access and affordability. By fostering complete implementation of the Federal Parity Law, the Mental Health Parity Compliance Act of 2019 will enhance those efforts, help improve access to care, and reduce long-term health system costs.

Sincerely,

American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association on Health and Disability
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Health
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy and Action

Education Development Center
EMDR International Association
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International OCD Foundation
The Jewish Federations of North America
Legal Action Center
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
National Assn 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 Council for Behavioral Health
National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National League for Nursing
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
NHMH - No Health without Mental Health
The Psychotherapy Action Network
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium
Sandy Hook Promise
SARDAA Schizophrenic and Related Disorders Alliance of America
School-Based Health Alliance
SMART Recovery
The Trevor Project
Tourette Association of America
Treatment Communities of America
Trinity Health
Trust for America’s Health