

# Mental Health Liaison Group

September 12, 2013

The Honorable Timothy Murphy  
322 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ron Barber  
1029 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressmen Murphy and Barber:

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 for H.R. 2957, the *Behavioral Health Information Technology Act of 2013*, 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. MHLG thanks you for your efforts in highlighting the importance of behavioral health.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provide \$20 billion in incentives to health care 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 health care community is excluded—clinical psychologists, psychiatric hospitals, substance use treatment facilities and mental health treatment facilities.

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 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 *Behavioral Health Information Technology Act of 2013* 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.

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers  
c/o Trevor Summerfield, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention at [tsummerfield@afsp.org](mailto:tsummerfield@afsp.org),

Julie Clements, American Psychiatric Association at [jclements@psych.org](mailto:jclements@psych.org) and Nancy Trenti, National Association of  
Psychiatric Health Systems at [ntrenti@naphs.org](mailto:ntrenti@naphs.org)

Our organizations look forward to working with you to pass this bill during the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress.

MHLG thanks you for your leadership and stands ready to work with you on the goal of improving behavioral health in America. We invite you to contact our work group co-chairs, Nancy Trenti at 202/393-6700, ext. 103 for comments or with questions.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families  
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Art Therapy Association  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association on Health and Disability  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Public Human Services Association  
Anxiety Disorders Association of America  
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  
CHADD - Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Alliance on Mental Illness- NAMI  
National Association for Children's Behavioral 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 for Behavioral Health  
National Council on Community Behavioral Healthcare  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
National Foundation for Mental Health  
State Associations of Addiction Services  
Treatment Communities of America  
The Trevor Project  
Tourette Syndrome Association  
United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association  
Witness Justice