

October 30, 2009

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6501

RE: Community Mental Health Centers Strongly Support H.R. 3962

Dear Madame Speaker:

On behalf of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare – representing 1,700 Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) and community-based behavioral healthcare organizations that serve over 6 million low income persons with mental and addiction disorders – I am writing to express our strong support for the Affordable Health Care for America Act (H.R. 3962).

H.R. 3962 has an array of provisions addressing the needs of this vulnerable consumer population. First and foremost, establishing a minimum nationwide eligibility floor of 150% of FPL will provide insurance coverage to millions of childless adults; CMHCs often service these individuals without compensation (about 25% of our total average caseload), or they receive no mental health care whatsoever. Moreover, given the ongoing state fiscal crisis, the legislation contains essential provisions that extend the temporary Medicaid FMAP increases originally passed in ARRA for an additional six months; that assistance might help avert across-the-board mental health/addiction service cuts as deep as 20% in many states.

In terms of the private sector, the National Council is pleased that the H.R. 3962 applies the Wellstone/Domenici/Kennedy Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act to all benefit package offered through the new health insurance exchange. Moreover, significant insurance market reforms including provisions that prohibit insurers from denying coverage based upon pre-existing conditions will enable million of Americans to participate in the private health insurance market place – often for the first time.

Of equal importance to the National Council is your decision to begin true reforms in the public mental health system by authorizing Federally Qualified Behavioral Health Centers (FQBHCs). For the first time since the Mental Health Systems Act of 1980, the definition sets forth national criteria for the certification of community-based mental health and addiction providers. This critically important provision also establishes FQBHCs as co-equal components of America's safety net along with public hospitals, rural health clinics and Community Health Centers. We cannot begin to address the unfolding crisis in public mental health without both increased accountability and resources, and H.R. 3962 takes a huge first step in that policy direction.

Madame Speaker, the National Council will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you in fighting for the passage of this measure, which is critical to improving mental health care for low income and uninsured Americans.

Sincerely,



Linda Rosenberg, MSW
President and CEO