

April 24, 2009

The Honorable Bart Gordon
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Gordon:

On behalf of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare – an organization representing 1,600 Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) and other community mental health and substance abuse agencies serving over 6 million low-income children and adults with mental illnesses – I am writing to express our strongest possible support for the “Seniors Mental Health Access Improvement Act of 2009.”

The Seniors Mental Health Access Improvement Act would help to ensure that the mental health needs of our senior population are met. The bill allows licensed Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors to seek reimbursement from Medicare for providing the same services already covered when performed by psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and psychiatric nurses. Despite being widely recognized by private health plans, licensed Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors have yet to be recognized under Medicare. This bill would not expand the scope of mental health services currently available to Medicare beneficiaries, but would simply expand the options of providers available under Medicare that are available under other public and private insurance payers. By offering greater access to mental health services, this bill would also reduce the number of costly hospital Emergency Department mental health visits.

The member organizations of the National Council strive to ensure access to necessary mental health services in their communities and the current workforce shortages present great challenges to them in meeting this need. This important legislation will provide community providers with additional options to meet critical needs.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. We look forward to working with you and your staff as you work to advance this legislation in the 111th Congress.

Sincerely,



Linda Rosenberg, MSW, CSW
President and CEO