

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 1, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman  
Senate Labor-HHS Appropriations  
Subcommittee  
131 Dirksen Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter  
Ranking Member  
Senate Labor-HHS Appropriations  
Subcommittee  
156 Dirksen Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Specter:

We are deeply concerned about our nation's public mental health safety net's ability to respond to an increasing number of Americans in need of basic mental health care. While States are under tremendous fiscal pressure to reduce services and cut provider reimbursements, the financial crisis is triggering a significant increase in demand for mental health services, particularly for care furnished by publicly funded Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs).

We urge you to address this crisis by investing at least \$100 million in additional funds for the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant in the FY 2010 Labor-Health and Human Services Appropriations Bill. The Mental Health Block Grant is the principal vehicle for federal financial support for evidenced-based comprehensive community services to people living with mental disorders.

A recent study by the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors clearly illustrates this crisis: 32 State mental health agencies are experiencing budget shortfalls in the current fiscal year and likely into FY10. These public authorities are responding with hiring freezes and by reducing the availability of services to low-income adults with severe mental illnesses and children with mental and emotional disturbances. At the same time, CMHCs across the country are reporting a spike among individuals seeking help but are newly unemployed, have no private health insurance, and are not eligible for Medicaid.

A substantial funding increase for this flexible program would enable States and community providers to immediately respond to patient caseloads swollen by rising unemployment.

Thank you for your attention to this critically important matter.

Sincerely,

Debbie Stabenow

Frank R. Lautenberg

Paul Udall

Mur Fierro

Whitman

Robert Menendez

Mr. F. Burt

John D. Dingell

Paul Levin

Kirsten E. Gillibrand

Edward M. Kennedy

Mark Begich

Ron Wyden

Maria Cantwell

Jim Johnson

Bill Clinton

John F. Kerry

Bob Casey, Jr.

Jim Webb

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