

September 28, 2009

The Honorable Debbie A. Stabenow
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Stabenow:

On behalf of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare and its 1,600 members providing community-based services to 6 million low income children and adults nationwide, I am writing to applaud your extraordinary leadership for persons living with mental illnesses and addiction disorders during the Senate Finance Committee mark up of “America’s Health Futures Act of 2009.”

Your willingness to simultaneously move several proposals that affect persons with mental illness and addiction disorders through national health care reform is simply without recent precedent in the United States Senate.

As an illustration, you insisted both that Medicaid eligible individuals with severe mental illnesses be served through the new Title XIX State Plan Option Promoting Health Homes in Chairman Baucus’ mark and that Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) be authorized to participate in this tremendously exciting integrated care initiative. A recent survey by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) found persons with serious mental disorders served by public sector agencies die 25 years sooner than other Americans. Your amendment holds out the hope that we can begin to make real progress against these horrific mortality rates.

But your leadership did not stop there. Later on, you secured the agreement of the Finance Committee to an amendment that mandates the application of the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-343) to all benefit plans offered through the State Insurance Exchanges created in the Chairman’s mark. By reaching bipartisan consensus on this key issue, you guaranteed non-discriminatory mental health and addiction insurance coverage for 25 million uninsured Americans with low to moderate incomes.

However, providing life saving medical care while improving behavioral health services for roughly 25 million Americans proved insufficient accomplishments for you in a single mark up. Therefore, you then secured bipartisan agreement on an additional amendment that clarified the availability of Therapeutic Foster Care through the Medicaid program for 50,000 children and serious mental and emotional disturbances served in the nation’s foster care system.

Senator Stabenow, a simple thank you seems inadequate to express the deep gratitude we feel for all you have done on behalf of the consumers we serve. In closing, it is the National Council’s judgment that the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy would be proud of the leadership you displayed last week.

Sincerely,



Linda Rosenberg, MSW
President and CEO