

# Mental Health Liaison Group

November 5, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Vice Chairwoman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Cc: Members, Senate and House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittees

Dear Chairman Cochran, Ranking Member Mikulski, Chairman Rogers, and Ranking Member Lowey:

On behalf of the Mental Health Liaison Group, the undersigned organizations are writing to urge you to provide as large of a share as possible of the sequestration relief included in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 to programs administered by the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. These Departments support important behavioral health, health research, social services, education, and workforce development activities.

The Mental Health Liaison Group is a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, parents and family members, advocates, providers, and mental health experts dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

The programs and services funded by these Departments serve a broad range of constituencies and needs, but they all share a common, fundamental goal of strengthening this nation by improving Americans' lives. Despite their profound impact on American health, child development, educational and skills attainment, and productivity, the "Labor-HHS" bill has been cut by \$21 billion (12 percent) since FY 2010, adjusted for inflation. In real terms, FY 2015 is at its second lowest level since FY 2001 — the only lower year being FY 2013 when sequestration's across-the-board cuts took effect.

Prior to enactment of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 and the resulting sequestration relief, the important programs and services funded by the Labor-HHS bill have borne the brunt of responsibility for budget cuts. Under the original FY 2016 allocations, Labor-HHS received a disproportionate cut of nearly \$4 billion from the already austere FY 2015 funding levels. These cuts translated into:

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers  
c/o Rebecca Farley, National Council for Behavioral Health, [RebeccaF@thenationalcouncil.org](mailto:RebeccaF@thenationalcouncil.org)

- A \$50 million cut to the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant and a \$77 million cut to other substance abuse treatment programs in the Senate bill, even as the country fights to recover from an opioid epidemic sweeping the nation.
- A \$24 million cut in the Senate bill to PATH homelessness programs, which provide services to people with serious mental illness or co-occurring substance use disorders who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless.
- A \$6 million cut in the House bill to the Primary-Behavioral Health Care Integration program, which supports coordinated mental and physical health care at a time when individuals living with serious mental illness are dying at an average age 25 years younger than the general population, primarily due to chronic physical health conditions.

Still, these examples just scratch the surface of the painful implications of the woefully inadequate 302(b) allocation for the Labor-HHS bill. While appropriators were able to include several much-needed increases to medical research funding through the National Institutes of Mental Health, the current 302(b) allocation is starkly insufficient to meet Americans' needs for other critical health care and human services programs. Increases to the Labor-HHS 302(b) allocation should be sufficient both to maintain the House and Senate Appropriations Committees' previously proposed line-item increases, as well as to supplement additional underfunded programs across the Departments. The allocations offered by Senator Mikulski and Representative Lowey would provide roughly a \$10 billion increase in funding for this subcommittee.

Now that Congress has reached a historic agreement to replace sequestration for two years, it is crucial that lawmakers reinvest in the well-being of Americans. The Labor-HHS bill improves the lives of every American. It deserves the moral and financial support of Congress. **We urge you to use the relief provided in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 to raise the allocation for Departments of Labor, HHS, and Education and related agencies, keeping in mind that the initial Labor-HHS allocation for FY 2016 is nearly \$4 billion below FY 2015—one of the deepest cuts across the 12 appropriations bills.**

The new subcommittee allocation should be sufficient to allow for restoration of the cuts contained in the House and Senate bills, while also providing sufficient room for meaningful investments in the broad range of programs funded in the bill.

We appreciate your time and attention to this important issue. For questions or more information, please contact Rebecca Farley, Mental Health Liaison Group Appropriations Committee Chair, at [rebeccaf@thenationalcouncil.org](mailto:rebeccaf@thenationalcouncil.org).

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association on Health and Disability\*

American Dance Therapy Association  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Orthopsychiatric Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Psychological Association  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Center for Clinical Social Work  
Clinical Social Work Guild 49  
Corporation for Supportive Housing  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Legal Action Center  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors  
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems  
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Council for Behavioral Health  
National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery  
National Disability Rights Network  
National League for Nursing  
School Social Work Association of America  
Tourette Association of America

*\*MHLG Observer*