

November 4, 2015

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

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 National Council for Behavioral Health and our member organizations, I am 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 National Council is a non-profit association representing 2,500 community-based mental health and addiction treatment providers. Along with our member organizations, we are dedicated to fostering clinical and operational innovation and promoting policies that ensure that all Americans have access to high quality health care services.

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 disproportionate cut of nearly \$4 billion from the already austere FY 2015 funding levels. These cuts translated into:

- 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.

- 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.

Still, these examples just scratch the surface of the painful implications of the woefully inadequate 302(b) allocation for the Labor-HHS bill. By contrast, 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.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Linda Rosenberg, MSW
President and CEO
National Council for Behavioral Health