

December 20, 2018

The Honorable Kamala Harris  
112 Hart Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 2050

Dear Senator Harris:

The undersigned national organizations dedicated to strengthening Americans' access to mental health care write to extend our strong support for the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Relief Act of 2018. This legislation is a vital step in addressing our nation's dire shortage of mental health professionals and reducing the unmet mental health treatment gap for Americans across the lifespan.

The prevalence of mental health and substance use disorders in the United States is alarming. According to the National Institutes of Mental Health, in the past year alone nearly one in five adults in the United States experienced a mental or behavioral health problem. In addition, data indicate approximately 21% of youth aged 13-18 experiences a severe mental disorder at some point in their life; for children aged 8-15, the estimate is 13%. Untreated mental health disorders can lead to a host of adverse consequences, including homelessness, academic failure, unemployment, contact with the criminal or juvenile justice system, and suicide. With approximately 105.7 million Americans currently living in federally designated mental health professional shortage areas, it is paramount to provide access to timely, appropriate, and effective mental health treatment to help individuals with mental and behavioral health conditions obtain the services they need to thrive.

As you know, there is a severe shortage of mental health professionals across almost all specialties, particularly in rural areas. A 2016 report from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) projected the supply of personnel in selected behavioral and mental health fields to be 250,000 workers short of the projected demand in 2025. Currently, every state faces a shortage of child and adolescent psychiatrists, with the current shortage estimated at over 20,000. Further, projections from HRSA indicate that with the increasing demand for psychological services, the current shortage of psychologists is expected to become larger — with a shortage of approximately 58,000 psychologists by 2025. Those same projections forecast a shortage of nearly 27,000 mental health counselors by 2025. Finally, the

Bureau of Labor Statistics says there is a need for 16% more social workers, or 109,000, by 2025.

We applaud your goal of building a robust mental and behavioral health workforce and look forward to working with you and your colleagues to pass the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Relief Act.

Sincerely,