

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

April 21, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human  
Services  
200 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Seema Verma  
Administrator  
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar and Administrator Verma:

We are writing to express our deep concern about the devastating impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on providers of mental health and addiction treatment. We request that a portion of the emergency funding appropriated by Congress to the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund (PHSSEF) as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act be immediately allocated to community-based health care providers that comprise the public health safety net for mental health and addiction services. These providers are serving millions of people with serious mental illnesses and acute substance use disorders on the frontlines of this crisis. They are in desperate need of our support and additional resources to maintain and scale operations both in the immediate and long-term future.

There is considerable evidence that COVID-19 is already exacerbating the nation's opioid epidemic as well the mental health crisis. Additionally, COVID-19 is taking a disproportionate toll on minority, poor and vulnerable populations. Within these communities, patients with serious mental illness and substance use disorder may be among the hardest hit. The anticipated influx of COVID-associated anxiety and depression, substance use, loneliness, and domestic violence, combined with an increased risk for contracting and transmitting COVID-19 among patients with underlying behavioral health conditions, are putting tremendous stress on our nation's behavioral health infrastructure.

Community Behavioral Health Organizations (CBHOs) are projecting a nearly 50% loss in revenue attributable to the pandemic that is resulting in closed clinics, mass staff layoffs and large reductions in the number of patients served. Moreover, the National Governors Association (NGA) recently noted in a letter to Congress that mental health and substance use providers faced "collapse" without emergency Medicaid financing. Emergency allocations from the PHSSEF would be employed for increasing workforce and staff trainings, purchasing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), retrofitting facilities with tele-mental health resources and related technology, reimbursing operational expenses related to developing and maintaining surge capacity, and replacing lost revenues attributable to coronavirus. This funding will ensure behavioral health providers can maintain capacity, infrastructure, and the workforce required to remain open and able to provide treatment. Absent this funding, a radically reduced capacity of community-based, inpatient and outpatient providers will leave hundreds of thousands without access to mental health and addiction treatment, leading to an upsurge in hospital emergency department utilization.

The frontline providers of care for these highly vulnerable patient populations need help now. As

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515

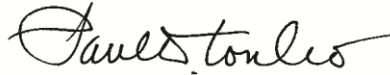
Health and Human Services prepares to distribute the remaining \$70 billion of the CARES Act emergency funding for provider relief, we urge you to utilize a methodology that supports mental health and substance use disorder providers and organizations so they can continue to provide essential care to those in need.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

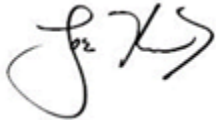
Sincerely,



Doris Matsui  
Member of Congress



Paul Tonko  
Member of Congress



Joseph Kennedy  
Member of Congress

Also signed by:

Rep. Bill Foster  
Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick  
Rep. Tim Ryan  
Rep. Deb Haaland  
Rep. Cindy Axne  
Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney  
Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Rep. Peter A. DeFazio  
Rep. Darren Soto  
Rep. Henry Cuellar  
Rep. Jerry McNerney  
Rep. Jan Schakowsky  
Rep. Suzanne Bonamici  
Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Rep. Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Rep. Linda T. Sánchez  
Rep. Danny Davis  
Rep. Daniel T. Kildee  
Rep. Grace F. Napolitano  
Rep. Alan Lowenthal  
Rep. David N. Cicilline  
Rep. Bobby L. Rush  
Rep. David Trone

Rep. Ann McLane Kuster  
Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee  
Rep. John B. Larson  
Rep. Judy Chu  
Rep. Jahana Hayes  
Rep. John B. Larson  
Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez  
Rep. Vicente Gonzalez  
Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester