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August 15, 2024

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1410 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Katie Porter
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kim Schrier
1110 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Angus King
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representatives Underwood, Schier and Porter, and Senator King:

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the national medical specialty society representing over 39,000 psychiatric physicians who treat mental health and substance use disorders, I write to express our support for your legislation, the Primary and Behavioral Health Care Access Act (H.R. 9133/S.4835).

Approximately 1 in 5 U.S. adults live with a diagnosed mental illness, however, less than half of those individuals received mental health treatment in the past year. Along with existing workforce shortages, out of pocket health care costs remain a major impediment to patient access. Last year, nearly 60% of those with unmet needs cited cost of care as a reason for not accessing treatment. By requiring private health insurance plans to cover three primary care visits and three behavioral health care visits during a plan year, without charging a copayment, coinsurance or deductible related fee, your bill would immediately make care more affordable and improve access for millions in need.

It is long understood that early intervention improves patient outcomes and prevents the worsening of conditions, reducing the risk of long-term disability or chronic illness. In addition, early intervention mitigates the likelihood of secondary complications or comorbidities such as substance use disorders, self-harm, or the development of other mental health conditions. By allowing more patients to seek treatment early on, your legislation will help to improve the long-term health of those with behavioral health disorders and reduce the concomitant risk of developing worsened and/or secondary conditions.

We commend your leadership in introducing H.R. 9133/S.4835 and look forward to working with you to advance this legislation. If you have any questions, please reach out to Dana Doran at ddoran@psych.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marketa Wills', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marketa Wills, MD, MBA, FAPA
Medical Director and CEO
American Psychiatric Association