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July 15, 2020

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US House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Anna Eshoo
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US House of Representatives
202 Cannon House Office Building
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The Honorable Greg Walden
Ranking Member
Energy and Commerce Committee
US House of Representatives
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Michael Burgess, MD
Health Subcommittee Ranking Member
US House of Representatives
2161 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member Walden, Chair Eshoo and Ranking Member Burgess:

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the national medical specialty association representing over 38,800 psychiatric physicians, I want to thank you for your hard work on thoughtfully moving mental health and substance use disorder (MH/SUD) legislation through regular order in the Energy and Commerce Committee. As you know, our country's mental healthcare system and those who depend on it are in dire need of support, especially with the increasing prevalence of anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses along with the ongoing opioid crisis exacerbated by substance use during the pandemic. I write to express APA's support for several of the bills that your Committee will mark up on Wednesday, July 15th.

Mental Health and Addiction Parity

APA is pleased that the Committee will be marking up H.R. 7539, the *Strengthening Behavioral Health Parity Act*, introduced by Representatives Kennedy (D-MA), Bilirakis (R-FL), Porter (D-CA) and Upton (R-MI). The legislation accomplishes APA's top priority of improving and strengthening the enforcement and insurer compliance with existing mental health and addiction parity law. As you know, the APA has worked with the bill's sponsors and the Committee on this issue and believes that better enforcement of existing parity law is a good first step in ensuring that patients with mental health and substance use disorders are able to access the care and treatment that they need without discriminatory treatment by insurers.

Telehealth

The expansion of telehealth waivers lifting site of service, geographic requirements and first-encounter requirements during the COVID-19 crisis have been instrumental in allowing patients to comply with physical distance requirements, while still accessing the healthcare that they need. The APA is pleased that the

Committee will be marking up H.R. 5201, the *Telemental Health Expansion Act of 2019*, introduced by Representatives Matsui (D-CA) and Johnson (R-OH). The APA has advocated for the lifting of geographic and originating site restrictions for mental health since the passage of the 21st Century Cures Act. H.R. 5201 would make permanent the inclusion of a patient's home, in all localities, as an eligible originating site from where to receive all mental health services via telehealth. This is an incredibly important step, especially during a pandemic, for patients to be able to continue receiving their mental health services via telehealth while complying with physical distancing requirements to keep vulnerable patients, clinicians, and communities safe. As APA works with Congress to continue many COVID-19-related expansions of telehealth authority and access, we are encouraged by the inclusion of this vital legislation in your markup and fully support its passage.

Suicide Prevention

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic has sadly increased the incidence of suicide and suicide attempts and increased calls to SAMHSA's lifeline. As such, the APA is pleased that the Committee has chosen to include H.R. 4564, the *Suicide Prevention Lifeline Improvement Act of 2019*, introduced by Reps. Katko (R-NY), Napolitano (D-CA) and Beyer (D-VA); H.R. 5619, the *Suicide Prevention Act*, introduced by Reps. Stewart (R-UT) and Matsui (D-CA); and H.R. 4585, the *Campaign to Prevent Suicide Act*, introduced by Reps. Beyer (D-VA) and Gianforte (R-MT). The APA strongly supports these bills and sees H.R. 4564, H.R.5619 and H.R. 4585, combined with H.R. 4194, the *National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2019*, introduced by Rep. Stewart (R-UT) and previously passed by your subcommittee, as an important package of complementary, suicide-focused improvements to our nation's suicide prevention efforts. As frontline providers, the APA also strongly supports H.R. 1646, the *Helping Emergency Responders Overcome (HERO) Act of 2019*," introduced by Rep. Bera (D-CA). As we continue to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and after the virus subsides, we must ensure that people have access to resources and support to manage their mental health and substance use conditions, including suicidal thinking. Together, these legislative proposals will save lives and APA is pleased that the Committee is considering them as a package.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter of support and for your attention to improving access to mental health and substance use care and services. We also thank you for your leadership during this challenging time. Please let us know how we can aid your efforts to foster a healthy nation during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. If you have any questions, please contact Michelle Greenhalgh at mgreenhalgh@psych.org / 202.459.9708.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Saul Levin" with "MD, MPA" written in smaller letters to the right.

Saul Levin, MD, MPA, FRCP-E, FRCPsych
CEO and Medical Director