



February 8, 2019

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Chairman
Senate Finance Committee
219 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
House Energy and Commerce Committee
2123 Rayburn Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Senate Finance Committee
219 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Greg Walden
Ranking Member
House Energy & Commerce Committee
2123 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Grassley and Pallone, Senator Wyden, and Rep. Walden:

On behalf of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Families USA and the National Council for Behavioral Health, we are writing to express our strong support for the bipartisan Excellence in Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Expansion Act.

It is alarming that the authorization for this important Medicaid demonstration has expired and funding will run-out this spring. As a result, life-saving behavioral health programs will be terminated in Oklahoma and Oregon on March 31st and in Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania on June 30th.

Medicaid is the largest single purchaser of mental health care in the United States. In addition, the Medicaid expansion authorized under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) has formed a key bulwark in our nation's battle against the deadly opioid crisis. At the same time, the eight (8) state Excellence Act Medicaid demonstration is an essential component of federal efforts to expand access to intensive community-based mental health services and addiction treatment.

While fully in effect for less than two years, early reports indicate that the program is succeeding well beyond initial expectations. According to an interim report released by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), nearly 400,000 patients with serious behavioral health conditions were served in only the first year of implementation. Crucially, the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) authorized under the program have offered dramatically improved access to Medicated Assisted Treatment (MAT) by reducing patient wait time through additional physicians and clinical staff. For example, there is early evidence that CCBHCs in the

Buffalo, NY metropolitan area are reducing drug overdose deaths¹. In rural Oklahoma, CCBHCs have worked closely with local police and sheriff's departments respond to the opioid epidemic. Permitting the Excellence Act demonstration to expire will jeopardize MAT access for thousands of patients – mostly Medicaid recipients – while forcing CCBHCs to lay off more than 3,000 clinicians.

The Excellence Act model offers a new hope: mental health care and addiction treatment supplied by properly financed community providers rather than emergency rooms, county jails, homeless shelters and local law enforcement agencies. Let's not lose this opportunity. We stand ready to assist you in extending this important demonstration on the earliest available legislative vehicle in the 116th Congress.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Lee Saunders
President
AFSCME



Frederick Isasi
Executive Director
Families USA



Linda Rosenberg
President and CEO
National Council for
Behavioral Health

¹ "Some Reason for Optimism In Opioid Epidemic". WGRZ News. 15 May 2018.
<https://www.wgrz.com/video/news/health/some-reason-for-optimism-in-opioid-epidemic/71-8129266>