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January 28, 2016

The Honorable Joseph Kennedy
United States House of Representatives
306 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Kennedy,

On behalf of the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), the largest medical society representing physicians and allied professionals treating addiction, I am writing to thank you for your bill, the Behavioral Health Coverage Transparency Act (HR 4276). This important act supports ASAM's efforts to increase patients' access to quality addiction treatment by strengthening parity in mental health and addiction benefits. Specifically, your bill would require issuers to disclose the analysis they perform in making parity determinations; require federal regulators to conduct random audits; and require the federal parity agencies to review denial rates for mental health versus medical claims. Moreover, it would create a central online portal so that consumers can access all information as a one-stop shop, and submit complaints and violations.

The morbidity and mortality statistics related to addiction, and in particular opioid addiction, are astounding. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), drug overdoses are the current leading cause of accidental death in the US, with 47,055 lethal drug overdoses in 2014. Of these drug overdoses, 18,893 deaths were related to prescription opioid analgesics, and 10,574 overdose deaths related to heroin.ⁱ These alarming statistics are driven by a very large treatment gap in this country. Nearly 90% of Americans with addiction do not receive treatment and 80% of individuals with opioid addiction are not treated.^{ii,iii} Those that take the first step towards recovery by seeking treatment often face immense barriers from insurance companies. For example, medications for the treatment of opioid addiction are often subject to onerous utilization management practices by public and private payers, including prior authorization requirements, fail first policies and requirements for psychosocial

services that may either be unavailable or not covered by a patient's insurance provider.

Your leadership and attention to ensuring greater oversight and transparency in parity implementation is much appreciated. ASAM was a part of the broader public health community that championed the passage of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008, which secured strong federal rules for ensuring addiction and mental health treatment benefits are covered at parity with other health benefits. Since the law was passed in 2008, ASAM has been advocating for full implementation and enforcement of the law to end health insurance discrimination for mental health and addiction coverage.

Strengthening parity protections for patients with addiction will have a long-term, positive impact on increasing access to quality addiction treatment and ultimately improved public health. The Behavioral Health Coverage Transparency Act details a thoughtful and actionable approach that supports this outcome. ASAM supports the goals of your bill and looks forward to working with you to secure its passage as we continue to advocate for adequate coverage of addiction and mental health treatment in order to save the lives of those in need of it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Jeffrey Goldsmith MD". The signature is fluid and cursive.

R. Jeffrey Goldsmith, MD, DLFAPA, DFASAM
President, American Society of Addiction Medicine

ⁱ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality File. (2015). Number and Age-Adjusted Rates of Drug-poisoning Deaths Involving Opioid Analgesics and Heroin: United States, 2000–2014. Atlanta, GA: Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/health_policy/AADR_drug_poisoning_involving_OA_Heroin_US_2000-2014.pdf

ⁱⁱ Legal Action Center. (2015). Confronting an Epidemic: The Case for Eliminating Barriers to Medication Assisted Treatment of Heroin and Opioid Addiction. Washington, D.C: Legal Action Center. Available at <http://lac.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/LAC-The-Case-for-Eliminating-Barriers-to-Medication-Assisted-Treatment.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Saloner PhD, Karthikeyan MPP. Changes in Substance Abuse Treatment Use Among Individuals with Opioid Use Disorders in the United States, 2004-2013. *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. 2015;314(14):1515-1517