



ADDICTION POLICY FORUM

March 20, 2018

The Honorable Michael Burgess, Chairman
Subcommittee on Health
House Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Gene Green, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health
House Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman, and Ranking Member:

I am writing on behalf of the Addiction Policy Forum to express our support for the Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Act of 2018 (H.R. 5102), which will incentivize health professionals to provide substance use disorder treatment in underserved communities.

All over the United States, communities are reporting that there are not enough treatment specialists available to help the growing number of Americans struggling daily with substance use disorder. From physicians, to nurses, to addiction counselors and other behavioral health specialists, additional treatment workers with proper training and experience are desperately needed across the nation. Attracting new providers to the demanding field can be difficult, and even when healthcare professionals do join the substance use disorder treatment workforce, burnout is a significant problem, further compounding the shortage of treatment staff with significant experience. In 2012, the turnover rates in the addiction services workforce ranged from 18.5% to more than 50%

The scope of the problem is not just anecdotal. More than 62 million people (20-23 percent) in the U.S. live in rural or frontier counties and 75 percent of these counties have no advanced behavioral health practitioners. In 2015, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reported that an estimated 21.7 million people aged 12 or older (8.1 percent of that population) needed substance use disorder treatment, but only an estimated 2.3

million of that population received treatment at a specialty facility. Stated plainly, only 10.8 percent of adolescents and adults who needed treatment received it.

Introduced recently by Representative Katherine Clark and Representative Hal Rogers, the Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Act would help address these serious gaps in services. Specifically, the legislation would bolster the critical substance use disorder treatment workforce by creating a student loan repayment program for healthcare professionals who enter and work in the substance use disorder treatment field. In an effort to attract the full range of experts needed for comprehensive substance use disorder treatment, the program would be available to a broad range of healthcare professionals including doctors, nurses, social workers, and mental health professionals. To qualify for the program, applicants must agree to be employed in a full-time substance use disorder treatment job in a direct patient care role located in either a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area or in areas experiencing a higher than average overdose death rate.

This legislation would be a significant step toward addressing the serious workforce shortages in SUD treatment across our nation, which is why we urge Congress to pass the Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Act quickly.

Sincerely,

Jessica Hulsey Nickel
President and CEO
Addiction Policy Forum

CC: The Honorable Greg Walden
The Honorable Frank Pallone