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ASSOCIATION
FOR BEHAVIORAL
HEALTHCARE

February 27, 2018

Congresswoman Katherine Clark
1415 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Clark:

The Association for Behavioral Healthcare (ABH) writes today in strong support of the soon to be introduced *Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Act of 2018*. We commend you for your work in addressing the workforce shortages that plague treatment providers across the country as they work to treat individuals who suffer from opioid addiction.

ABH is a Massachusetts-based, statewide association representing more than eighty community-based mental health and addiction treatment provider organizations. Our members are the primary providers of publicly-funded behavioral healthcare services in the Commonwealth, serving approximately 81,000 Massachusetts residents daily, 1.5 million residents annually, and employing over 46,500 people.

As you well know, Massachusetts and the United States are in the midst of an unprecedented opioid epidemic. In Massachusetts alone, 1,977 individuals died of opioid related deaths in 2017. This is a decrease of 179 individuals from 2016, the first year-over-year decline in several years. The treatment community is grateful for the continued commitment of Congress to combatting this epidemic, but the demand for treatment continues to outpace capacity.

ABH members continue to report difficulty in recruiting and retaining adequately trained staff to serve individuals across the addiction treatment system. Based on data from a 2017 survey of ABH members, we know that the overall pay rates in Massachusetts acute care hospitals are significantly higher than in the behavioral health organizations in the state. The overall pay gap for comparable jobs was approximately 22.8%. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reported to Congress in 2013 that the “growing workforce crisis in the addictions field” is due to a variety of factors, including stigma, an aging workforce and inadequate compensation.¹

This legislation is essential as it allows individuals who chose to work in the addiction field to access student loan repayment, and it includes and encourages the participation of a wide variety of professionals and paraprofessionals. The treatment system relies on staff practicing at the top of their licensure in order to serve more clients, supported by direct care staff and recovery coaches.

¹ <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/PEP13-RTC-BHWORK/PEP13-RTC-BHWORK.pdf>

The legislation enumerates a number of important positions, and allows the Secretary of Health and Human Services to determine other relevant professionals as he/she sees fit.

ABH is pleased to offer our strong support for this important piece of legislation. Should you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 508-647-8385 x 11 or vdigravio@abhmass.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Vicker V. DiGravio III". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Vicker V. DiGravio III
President/CEO