

February 27, 2018

The Honorable Katherine Clark  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1415 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hal Rogers  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2406 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Clark and Rogers,

On behalf of the National Council for Behavioral Health and our 2,900 community-based mental health and addiction treatment member organizations, I am writing to thank you for your leadership in authoring legislation to create a student loan forgiveness program for addiction treatment professionals. Your bill, the Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Act of 2018., would improve access to desperately needed substance use treatment services for millions of Americans across the country.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 22 million Americans aged 12 or older have experienced a substance use disorder. Yet, only 1 in every 10 people living with addiction receive treatment services. This unmet need, known as the “treatment gap,” is caused in large part by severe workforce shortages in the addiction treatment field. Your legislation would help addiction treatment providers meet the rising demand for treatment by strengthening their ability to attract and retain high-quality staff.

One major barrier to confronting our nation’s opioid crisis is the lack of a sufficient addiction treatment workforce. Community-based addiction and mental health treatment providers report high turnover rates and difficulty in filling vacant positions. Salaries in behavioral health care – **particularly in addiction services** – are well below those for parallel positions in other health care sectors and in business ([SAMHSA, 2013](#)). Your bill offers providers a powerful recruitment tool to increase the number of dedicated and well-trained addiction treatment professionals working in high-need communities, including those areas hit-hard by the opioid epidemic.

Loan forgiveness programs have proven successful in helping primary care and mental health clinics attract a well-trained workforce into medically underserved areas, yet addiction treatment providers have not had the same access to federal loan forgiveness funds. By creating a loan forgiveness program dedicated specifically to substance use disorder services, your legislation would grow the availability of substance use disorder treatment professionals. By increasing addiction treatment capacity nationwide, your bill helps to implement a comprehensive strategy to address the nation’s growing addiction crisis.

Thank you for your dedication to expanding access to lifesaving treatment for millions of Americans living with substance use disorders. The National Council looks forward to working with you and your colleagues to see this important legislation through to passage.

Sincerely,



Linda Rosenberg  
President and CEO  
National Council for Behavioral Health