

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 29, 2020

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden
Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member Walden:

We are writing to urge the Committee on Energy and Commerce to quickly and favorably report out H.R. 945, the Mental Health Access Improvement Act.

We are grateful to the Committee for considering this vital legislation at its legislative hearing on June 30, and applaud your commitment to ensuring that all Americans – including our nation’s seniors – have access to the mental health services they need.

As you know, seniors suffer from a broad range of mental illnesses, including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, Alzheimer’s disease, and dementia. Unfortunately, while many of these conditions can be managed effectively if treatment is sought, many older Americans lack access to mental health professionals. Left untreated, mental health disorders lead to worse health outcomes, lower quality of life, and higher medical costs.

For this reason, it is imperative that we expand the pool of qualified mental health professionals who are eligible to treat Medicare beneficiaries – a list currently restricted to psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers and psychiatric nurses.

Medicare does not currently allow beneficiaries to receive care from mental health counselors (MHCs) and marriage and family therapists (MFTs), even though MHCs and MFTs are required to obtain education and training equivalent to that of clinical social workers and collectively provide almost 40 percent of mental health services – a number that rises significantly in underserved areas.

To expand the pool of mental health professionals available to Medicare beneficiaries, H.R. 945 would add MHCs and MFTs to the network of providers delivering mental or behavioral health services to Medicare beneficiaries. The law would enable Medicare beneficiaries to receive the care they need from thousands of qualified professionals.

This bipartisan, bicameral legislation has amassed over 110 cosponsors in the House, and is supported by a broad range of mental health care stakeholders, including the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapists, the American Mental Health Counselors Association, the Michael J. Fox Foundation, the National Council on Aging, and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

We thank you for considering this critical legislation at the Committee's June 30 hearing, and urge the Committee to quickly advance the legislation to the Floor of the House.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Mike Thompson in blue ink.

MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of John Katko in blue ink.

JOHN KATKO
Member of Congress