



June 26, 2020

The National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD)— the member organization representing the state executives responsible for public mental health service delivery systems in all 50 states, 5 territories, and the District of Columbia writes in support of Rep. Latta's H.R. 7147 and Rep. Bustos' H.R. 7159, bills authorizing a Mental Health Block Grant set-aside for crisis services in the bills to be considered during next week's Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee hearing. We are very grateful to both members of Congress for their efforts in introducing and offering this legislation.

Nearly everyone, dealing at times with personal, social, physical, and environmental stresses, is at risk of experiencing a mental health crisis, which can often result in social or familial conflict, the contemplation of suicide, or a resort to substance abuse. It is crucial to have a comprehensive, community-based, 24/7 crisis services system that can address these personal crises by providing access to qualified mental health professionals and services at the time and places they occur.

Neither emergency rooms or the criminal justice system enable persons with mental illness or substance use disorders to receive the most appropriate care. Crisis services can help de-escalate a personal mental health crisis and bring calm to the individual and the situation, diverting from emergency room admission, helping to avoid conflict with law enforcement and the criminal justice system, and eliminating the perceived need to alleviate stress through substance abuse. Strong evidence supports establishing crisis response systems like those that have demonstrated success in providing timely and appropriate care (and reducing public costs) in Arizona, Colorado, and Georgia.

Funding crisis services will be especially crucial to addressing the significant trauma and mental health crises very likely to result from the looming fear of COVID-19 infection and the social isolation and economic pressures resulting from the measures implemented to slow the infection's spread.

Again, we thank Reps. Latta and Bustos for their leadership on this issue and stand ready to aid their efforts in advancing this crucial need.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Brian Hepburn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brian Hepburn, M.D.

Executive Director

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