

August 22, 2017

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
Unites States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
Unites States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray,

We write today to urge support for the Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET) for Paraprofessionals and Professionals program at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). This is a vital program to ensure that this nation has a pipeline of well-trained health professionals to address behavioral health needs in the United States.

The BHWET program supports education and training efforts at institutions of higher education, accredited health professional training programs, and behavioral paraprofessional, and peer paraprofessional certificate training programs to help develop and expand the much-needed behavioral health workforce in the United States. These professionals are being trained to serve populations in communities across the nation, including those in underserved and rural areas. This program is especially critical as the nation faces a shortage of behavioral health providers. According to HRSA, by 2025, shortages are projected for mental health and substance abuse social workers; psychiatrists; clinical, counseling, and school psychologists; school counselors; marriage and family therapists; mental health counselors, and substance abuse and behavioral health disorders counselors. A strong workforce is needed to ensure access to behavioral health-care services.

We were pleased to see bipartisan support for the BHWET program when it was authorized as part of *21st Century Cures Act* in December 2016. The BHWET program is just a few years old, but has already helped support thousands of health professionals. Unfortunately, the House Labor-HHS-Ed appropriations bill proposed cutting this vital program in half; reducing funding from \$50 million to \$25 million in FY 2018. As you move forward with the Senate Labor-HHS-Ed bill, we ask that you maintain funding for the BHWET program at its current level of \$50 million.

Thank you for your consideration. We know you are facing significant challenges, but we assure you this program is important to the healthcare infrastructure in the United States.

Sincerely,

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Association of Colleges of Nursing

American Psychological Association

Council on Social Work Education

National Board for Certified Counselors