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May 18, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol, H-232
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol, S-230
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader McConnell:

Congress and the Administration have taken bold action to address and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although ensuring physical health and safety from COVID-19 has been a primary focus, I am concerned that behavioral health care has not received the necessary and urgent attention it deserves. The effects of the pandemic will impact mental health far after we emerge from this virus, and access to inpatient behavioral health care will be critical. As we consider additional measures to help combat this virus, I am writing to urge the inclusion of measures to reform the Institutes for Mental Disease (IMD) exclusion. H.R. 5006, the Expanding Access to Inpatient Mental Health Act is one such effort that would enable greater access to critical mental health treatment. Reforming the IMD exclusion has bipartisan support, and most notably, the provision was included in the President's FY2021 Budget.

As you are aware, the IMD exclusion is outdated and has served as a major barrier for individuals seeking inpatient behavioral health care for years. The IMD Exclusion limits the number of beds available, the days of which an individual can receive care, and disproportionately effects Medicaid beneficiaries, the group with greatest need for inpatient behavioral health services.

Our nation was facing a mental health crisis prior to the pandemic, and we have every reason to believe that the need for mental health care will increase at an unprecedented rate as a consequence of the virus. Now more than ever it is critical that we ensure access for those in need of inpatient mental health care, and reform the IMD exclusion by including H.R. 5006 in any upcoming COVID-19 response package.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Tom Emmer
Member of Congress