

November 23, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
H-232, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-221, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
H-204, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-230, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, and Leader McCarthy,

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and our nearly 110,000 members across the country, we are writing today to urge that you include policies in an end-of-year legislative package that will enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities.

We ask you to consider issues related to enhancing mental health access, reducing childhood poverty, and student loan debt relief.

### **Enhancing Mental Health Access**

***Improve access to clinical social worker (CSW) services under the Medicare program.*** The Senate Finance Committee's Behavioral Health Workforce for the Future Act discussion draft included two provisions of the bipartisan *Improving Access to Mental Health Act (S. 870/H.R. 2035)*. The first allows CSWs to bill Medicare independently when providing services to beneficiaries residing in Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNFs). The second removes an access barrier by allowing CSWs to bill for Health and Behavior Assessment and Intervention (HBAI) services, which help Medicare beneficiaries with emotional and psychosocial concerns that arise because of a medical condition (such as a diagnosis of cancer) and are unrelated to a mental health condition.

Additionally, the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act* includes a provision to increase reimbursement rates for CSWs from 75% to 85% of the physician fee schedule, putting CSWs on par with most other non-physician providers in Medicare. We urge you to add this provision to any end-of-year package as the current reimbursement rate impacts access to care for beneficiaries and makes CSW participation in the program more difficult in a time of behavioral health workforce shortages.

We urge you to include all three of these provisions that enjoy bipartisan support from the *Improving Access to Mental Health Act* in an end-of-year package.

***Improve access to telehealth services through the Medicare program.*** We support a minimum two-year extension of the current telehealth flexibilities as passed by the House in the Advancing Telehealth Beyond COVID-19 Act of 2021 (H.R. 4040). The telehealth flexibilities implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic Public Health Emergency (PHE) transformed how care is being delivered throughout the country in many healthcare sectors, including mental health and substance use disorder services. To ensure stable continuation of telehealth services in

the manner currently provided while allowing additional time to examine the data on utilization and effectiveness, we urge this extension.

We also urge the removal of the statutory six-month, in-person service requirement imposed on telehealth for mental health services in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Pub. L. 116-260). Removal of this requirement enjoys bipartisan, bicameral support. Telehealth for mental health services has proven enormously effective and this requirement simply is unnecessary and imposes a barrier to care for some. At a minimum, we request that the telehealth extension also apply to this in-person service requirement and delay its implementation for the same length of time.

### **Reducing Child Poverty**

NASW urges you to enhance the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and prioritize tax credits supporting our children, youth, and families as you lead negotiations on tax policy provisions during the end of the 117th Congress.

The CTC and EITC improvements transformed the lives of tens of millions of children, providing resources to help them build a sturdy foundation to learn, grow, and thrive. Improvements to the CTC alone were largely responsible for nearly cutting our national child poverty rate in half in 2021, lifting 3 million children — including 1 million children under 6 — above the poverty line. The enhanced monthly tax credits helped households with children catch up on rent and translated to more food on the table for children and warm clothes in the winter. It meant more money for educational resources, music or soccer lessons, or a trip to the zoo.

However, the expiration of the CTC and EITC improvements, combined with high food costs and rising rents, sent many families with children back to experiencing significant material hardship, increasing child hunger, and suffering. It is imperative that Congress include enhancements to these programs to support vulnerable children and families.

### **Student Loan Debt Relief**

The House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Subcommittee included language in its FY 2023 funding measure applying the Department of Education's now-expired Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Waiver to unused Temporary Expanded PSLF (TEPSLF) funds. This would allow the Department of Education to carry out TEPSLF in the same manner, and with the same terms and conditions, as the waiver. The waiver had been a lifeline for student loan borrowers who have served our nation through their public service. We know of social workers who have had their loans forgiven thanks to the PSLF Waiver. We urge inclusion of this language in the full FY 2023 Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies spending measure.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations. If you have any questions, please reach out to me at [sbutts.nasw@socialworkers.org](mailto:sbutts.nasw@socialworkers.org).

Sincerely,



Sarah C. Butts, MSW  
Director, Public Policy