

Mental Health Liaison Group

September 15, 2017

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senate Democratic Leader Charles Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Orrin Hatch
Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
104 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Ron Wyden
Ranking Member, Senate Finance Committee
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

House Speaker Paul Ryan
1233 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi
233 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Greg Walden
Chairman, House Energy and Commerce Committee
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Frank Pallone
Ranking Member, House Energy and Commerce
Committee
237 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Ryan, Democratic Leaders Schumer and Pelosi, Chairmen Hatch and Walden, and Ranking Members Wyden and Pallone:

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG)—a coalition of almost 70 national organizations representing consumers, parents and family members, advocates, providers, and mental health experts dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness—is writing to urge Congress to take immediate action to enact a five-year extension of CHIP funding. Since its inception in 1997, CHIP, together with Medicaid, has helped to reduce the numbers of uninsured children by a remarkable 68 percent. With CHIP funding set to expire on September 30, 2017, Congress must act now to stabilize the CHIP funding stream and protect the gains in children’s health coverage that have resulted in more than 95 percent of all children in America being enrolled in some form of insurance coverage.

CHIP has a proven track record of providing high-quality, cost-effective coverage, including mental health and substance use disorder services, for low-income children and pregnant women in working families. CHIP was a smart, bipartisan solution to a real problem facing American children and families when it was adopted in 1997 and its importance and impact in securing a healthy future for children in low-income families has only increased. There is widespread, bipartisan agreement about the importance of CHIP in providing affordable, pediatric-specific coverage to almost 9 million children who cannot afford private coverage or lack access to employer-based coverage. It is a model program that has played a critical role in reducing the number of uninsured children by more than 50 percent while improving health outcomes and access to care for children and pregnant women across the nation.

With federal CHIP funding set to end on September 30, 2017, states are facing critical decisions about the future of their CHIP programs. Many states are just weeks away from setting in motion processes to establish waiting lists and send out disenrollment notices to families. Once undertaken, these actions will have an immediate effect, creating chaos in program administration and confusion for families.

Extending CHIP is particularly important in light of the ongoing debate on and uncertainty regarding the future of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Medicaid, and the stability of the individual insurance markets. With state budgets already set for the coming year, states are counting on CHIP to continue in its current form. Changes to CHIP’s structure – including changes to the Maintenance of Effort or the enhanced CHIP matching rate – would cause significant disruption in children’s coverage and leave states with critical shortfalls in their budgets.

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Laurel Stine, J.D., American Psychological Association at lstine@apa.org
and Debbie Plotnick, MSS, MLSP, Mental Health America at dplotnick@mentalhealthamerica.net

Today, we stand united in urging Congress to honor CHIP's 20 years of success by enacting a five-year extension of CHIP funding so that this critical source of health coverage, including coverage for mental health and substance use disorders, for children and pregnant women will be maintained into the future.

Thank you for your consideration of this critically important health care issue for children and pregnant women.

Sincerely,

*American Academy of Pediatrics
American Art Therapy Association
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association on Health and Disability
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Dance Therapy Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychiatric Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition
The Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
The Jewish Federations of North America
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD)
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Disability Rights Network
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National League for Nursing
Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium
Sandy Hook Promise
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America
School Social Work Association of America
Treatment Communities of America
The Trevor Project
Trinity Health
Young Invincibles*