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HOUSE REPUBLICAN STEERING

REPUBLICAN WHIP TEAM

DEPUTY WHIP TEAM

April 27, 2022

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

I urge you to help the approximately 6.5 million individuals in rural and frontier America who live with a mental illness.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding innovations tied to the expansion of telemedicine, serious obstacles remain to expanding access to mental health care in rural America. Most notably, rural and remote areas have greater shortages of specialized behavioral health workers than urban and suburban areas.<sup>2</sup> This chronic specialist shortage, particularly of psychiatrists, affects the ability of adults with mental illnesses to obtain timely, high-quality mental health services.

While primary care providers play an important role in the delivery of behavioral health services, they may not have the expertise to assess, treat, and manage patients with more complex mental disorders. Given this and other challenges, we must ensure the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is in the best position possible to find solutions to the mental health crisis in our rural communities.

In service of that goal, I request you include the following language in fiscal year 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations legislation:

*The Committee recognizes the unique challenges faced by those who live in rural and frontier areas to access regular mental health and substance use services. These challenges are further complicated when individuals need timely behavioral health crisis services led by behavioral health professionals in these areas. Providers in rural areas also face unique obstacles. They may lack the full staff or resources to faithfully implement evidence-based practices or meet requirements for grant funding. Given these*

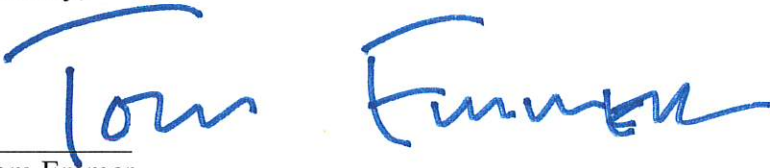
<sup>1</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Results from the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: detailed tables* [Internet], 2017. (<https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DetTabs-2016/NSDUH-DetTabs-2016.pdf?>)

<sup>2</sup> SMI Adviser, *Improving Behavioral Health Services for Individuals with SMI in Rural and Remote Communities*, 2021. ([Improving-Behavioral-Health-Services-for-Individuals-with-SMI-in-Rural-and-Remote-Communities-Full-Report-September-2021.pdf](https://www.smiadviser.org/Improving-Behavioral-Health-Services-for-Individuals-with-SMI-in-Rural-and-Remote-Communities-Full-Report-September-2021.pdf) (smiadviser.org))

*challenges, the Committee directs the Assistant Secretary of Mental Health and Substance Use in coordination with the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the Director of the Health Resources and Services Administration to submit a joint report to the Committee providing details on what strategies these agencies are implementing to address the unique concerns of those in rural communities. The report should address what resources are needed to improve and sustain access to prevention, treatment, and recovery-oriented services, including crisis response services, and to recruit, train, and sustain sufficient workforce in rural and frontier settings within six months after enactment of this Act.*

Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Emmer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "T" and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Tom Emmer  
Member of Congress