



April 30, 2014

The Honorable Ron Barber
1029 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Endorsement of Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014

Dear Representative Barber,

I am writing on behalf of the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) in support of the Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014, which expands funding opportunities for mental health initiatives, supports the behavioral health workforce, and improves Medicaid and Medicare mental health services. NBCC is the national credentialing organization for the counseling profession, representing over 53,000 National Certified Counselors (NCCs) in the United States. NBCC also develops and administers the examinations for licensure of mental health counselors in all fifty states and the District of Columbia.

In particular, NBCC supports the Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014 because it expands the pool of Medicare mental health professionals to include mental health counselors. It will increase access to mental health services for the elderly and disabled, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Medicare is the largest health care program in the country, covering over 49 million Americans. Medicare beneficiaries are at high risk for mental health problems, such as depression and suicide. Research shows that fewer than 40% of older adults with mental and/or substance use disorders obtain treatment. The lack of mental health providers plays a key role in the failure to access care.

The Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014 will immediately increase the pool of qualified mental health professionals by adding 144,000 state-licensed mental health counselors to the program. Counselors are already licensed in all 50 states to diagnose and treat mental and emotional disorders and provide medically necessary covered Medicare services. Counselors are providing this care through private insurers and behavioral health organizations, so extending coverage will provide continuity of care to those who age into the Medicare program.

We applaud Representative Barber for taking a leadership role on this important piece of legislation. Our seniors can't afford to wait any longer for the treatments they so desperately need. The Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014 is an important step in ensuring all Medicare beneficiaries have access to life-saving mental health care and NBCC supports it. Please feel free to contact David Bergman at Bergman@nbcc.org / [703-739-6208](tel:703-739-6208) with any questions and thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Thomas W. Clawson, Ed.D., NCC, NCSC, LPC
President and CEO, NBCC