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July 24, 2017

The Honorable Lynn Jenkins
1526 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-1602

RE: THANK YOU FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP ON BEHAVIORAL HEATH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY BILL

Dear Representative Jenkins:

On behalf of the Behavioral Health Information Technology (BHIT) Coalition, the undersigned organizations are writing to thank you for your outstanding leadership in spearheading legislation authorizing a behavioral health information technology pilot program administered by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI).

Patients with mental health and substance use disorders are now experiencing an overwhelming crisis. Prescription opioids are behind the deadliest drug overdose epidemic in U.S. history. More than 52,000 Americans died of overdoses in 2015 — an all-time record — and experts believe the numbers have continued to rise. Persons with opioid addiction also have an array of comorbid medical/surgical chronic including Hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS and cirrhosis. In addition, substance use services have become both more clinically effective and complex with the introduction of medication assisted treatment.

Similarly, persons with severe mental illness experience extremely high rates of mortality and morbidity. In the absence of Electronic Health Records (EHRs), challenges in managing these patients lead to extraordinary costs. For example, a 2014 Rutgers University study of thirteen low income communities in New Jersey found that Medicaid recipients with serious mental health and addiction disorders accounted for an astounding 43.2% of all hospitalizations in these communities between 2008 and 2011, and this patient population composed 75% of all "higher users."

These extreme circumstances call for arming psychiatric hospitals, Community Mental Health Centers, psychologists, social workers, and addiction treatment providers with the electronic tools they need to effectively manage these patients and address this emerging public health crisis. Your legislation – which authorizes a zero cost CMMI pilot program – is a key first step.

Thank you for your leadership.

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Sincerely,

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