



Government Affairs

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Support S. 1879 & H.R. 3032

These measures would enhance access to mental health services and enable Medicare to cover counseling services.

Bipartisan legislation introduced in the House and Senate would improve access to mental health services and permit Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) to be reimbursed by Medicare. In the Senate, the *Seniors Mental Health Access Improvement Act*, S. 1879, was introduced by Senators John Barrasso (R-WY) and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI). In the House of Representatives, the *Mental Health Access Improvement Act*, H.R. 3032, was introduced by Representatives John Katko (R-NY) and Mike Thompson (D-CA). Both bills would enable LPCs to treat Medicare beneficiaries.

Key Points:

- Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) are licensed in every state, have at least one post-graduate degree and help individuals with depression, drug and alcohol abuse, PTSD, chronic pain and other mental health challenges.
- Care provided by Licensed Professional Counselors is covered by Medicaid, but not by Medicare, resulting in far too many seniors who cannot afford to continue seeing a counselor when they reach age 65. Many individuals can afford counseling through their employer-provided health-care plans, but can no longer afford this care after they retire.
- One in four older adults experiences a mental health problem such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia or dementia, according to the American Psychological Association. Depression affects 6.5 million Americans over age 65, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Licensed Professional Counselors can play a vital role in ending the opioid crisis, and these bills would allow seniors to have access to much-needed treatment. Opioid abuse among seniors is a growing problem. Overall, the number of older adults with substance abuse problems is expected to double to five million by 2020, according to the American Psychological Association. With Medicare able to cover counseling provided by Licensed Professional Counselors, these seniors will have access to desperately needed addiction treatment.

Please cosponsor this important legislation. For more information, contact Chris Andresen at chris.andresen@dutkogr.com or Art Terrazas at aterrazas@counseling.org.



Support the FY 2019 Labor, HHS Appropriations bill

This measure would provide funding for FY 2019 Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants.

The FY 2019 Labor, HHS Appropriations bill provides \$1.2 billion in funding for Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants—a continuation of funding for this important grant program.

Among other things, the Student Support grants fund activities that make up a well-rounded education, including those that expand access to, or coordinate resources for, important school-based mental health services and supports. These activities may include the development of critical tools such as trauma-informed practices and the establishment and maintenance of school counseling and bullying-prevention programs.

Background: The Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) Grant Program

In FY 2017, the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program was rolled into the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) grant program under Title IV, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The American Counseling Association successfully advocated to ensure full funding for the SSAE grant program. Working with the Title IV-A Coalition, ACA encouraged Congress to provide adequate funding to keep the program firmly in place and to reject the government's initial piecemeal approach to funding. Due in part to ACA's extensive advocacy efforts, the SSAE grant program saw a \$700 million increase in funds for FY18. The program is now funded at \$1.1 billion for FY18.

This funding will help provide students with more access to mental health services within a school setting. Schools will be able to hire more school counselors, create more opportunities for mental-health-related programs and develop programs designed to help create a safe and healthy school environment and end school violence.

ESSA and Increased Title I Funding

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) also provided increased Title I, Part A funding for schools and school districts serving low-income communities. Title I, Part A funding is designated to "ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments," according to the U.S. Department of Education.

The American Counseling Association strongly supported the Title I, Part A portion of the Every Student Succeeds Act through advocacy efforts and ACA member engagement on the issue. ACA's work helped to increase the Title I, Part A funding by \$300 million, to \$15.76 billion for FY18. This increased funding, available to help schools in low-income communities provide better learning opportunities to develop well-rounded students, may be used to strengthen school-based counseling programs.

Please support funding for this crucial legislation. For more information, contact Chris Andresen at chris.andresen@dutkogr.com or Guila Todd at gtodd@counseling.org.