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The Hon. Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
Attn: Reva Price

The Hon. Henry Waxman
Chair, Energy & Commerce Cmte.
Attn: Ruth Brown

The Hon. Fortney Stark
Chair, Ways & Means Health Subcmte.
Attn: Debbie Curtis

October 29, 2009

Dear House Leaders:

The American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA), the only national professional organization to exclusively represent the interests of licensed mental health counselors, wishes to endorse the Affordable Health Care for America Act, H.R. 3962. This legislation promises the elimination of insurance companies' ability to deny Americans coverage as a consequence of their health status, race, occupation, or gender. It also reduces costs and promotes overall health by providing Americans access to preventive health care and wellness programs.

AMHCA especially commends H.R. 3962's treatment of mental health. Currently, millions of American seniors lack access to outpatient mental health care because they reside in areas not served or underserved by Medicare's current pool of outpatient mental health providers. Section 1308 of H.R. 3962 expands Medicare's outpatient mental health provider pool to include licensed mental health counselors. Inclusion of these professionals will provide millions of Medicare beneficiaries with much needed access to well-educated and highly-skilled mental health professionals. AMHCA also believes inclusion of licensed mental health counselors in the Medicare provider pool will make Medicare a more efficient purchaser of mental health services, as Medicare beneficiaries seeking immediate and less costly preventive outpatient mental health services reduce the likelihood that they and taxpayers will incur more costly future inpatient mental health and physical health costs.

AMHCA commends you and your staffs for championing the need for affordable, quality mental health care, in addition to affordable, quality physical health care. In addition to commending Section 1308 of H.R. 3962, AMHCA wholeheartedly supports your inclusion of mental health benefits as benefits that must be included in any health care benefits package. Furthermore, AMHCA praises you, your staff, and your committee members for ensuring the mental health parity provisions achieved with the passage of the Wellstone-Domenici Mental Health Parity Act be wrapped into health care reform.

AMHCA is urging all of its members to contact their legislators in the House and the Senate to champion the provisions in H.R. 3962, and specifically, the provisions related to mental health, to be the final language in health care reform to be submitted to President Obama for his signature.

Sincerely,

Julie A. Clements, J.D.
Director of Legislative Affairs
American Mental Health Counselors Association