



*A Passionate Voice for Compassionate Care*

Sept. 26, 2018

U.S. House  
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

On behalf of the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA), the national leadership organization of more than 2,000 Catholic health care systems, hospitals, long-term care facilities, sponsors, and related organizations, I commend the members of the House and Senate for approving their versions of legislation to address the nation's opioid crisis and urge your support for the final bill, the Support for Patients and Communities Act (HR 6).

Catholic health providers recognize that each human life is sacred and possesses inalienable worth, and that health care is essential to promoting and protecting the inherent dignity of every individual. We also recognize that supportive and readily available substance use disorder (SUD) treatments are essential facets of holistic, person-centered and effective health care. The first principle in our *Vision for U.S. Health Care* affirms our call to pay special attention to those most likely to lack access to health care, many of whom are in desperate need of SUD services. This commitment is why the Catholic health ministry strongly supports efforts to increase access to these services and ensure that they become fully integrated into our health care system.

CHA has supported many of the provisions included in HR 6, particularly those that would increase access to care under Medicaid and care for such vulnerable populations as children and pregnant women, as well as provisions to increase the use of telehealth services. We are particularly pleased that the final version of this legislation includes the IMD Care Act, to provide state Medicaid programs with the option to cover care during FY2019-23 in certain Institutions for Mental Diseases (IMD) that may be otherwise non-federally-reimbursable under the IMD exclusion. We are also pleased that the bill includes measures to ensure access to mental health and substance use disorder services for children and pregnant women under the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

However, we are disappointed that legislation introduced in the Senate (S. 1850, the Protecting Jessica Grubb's Legacy Act) and overwhelmingly approved in the House (HR 6082) to align current regulations for SUD treatment records with existing patient protections under HIPAA for treatment, payment and health care operations was not included in HR 6. For health providers, the alignment of SUD records with other medical records is essential to providing whole-person care. It enables the essential flow of patient information among providers that is critical to the timely and effective delivery of health care and critical to patient safety and quality. Given the broad and bipartisan support for HR 6082, we continue to urge the Senate to approve this bill as well before the end of the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress.



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Thank you again for your attention to the urgent matter of opioid and other substance use disorders. We know that you share the goal of our Catholic health ministry in providing the best possible care and treatment for those who need it, and we hope approval of the Support for Patients and Communities Act will provide effective additional resources for doing so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sr. Carol Keehan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sr. Carol Keehan, DC  
President and CEO