December 14, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of over 100,000 addiction counselors, peers, educators, and other addiction-focused health care professionals, NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, urges you to include several key policy priorities in any end-of-year legislative package. These provisions, highlighted below, are crucial for NAADAC’s work to create healthier individuals, families and communities through prevention, intervention, quality treatment and recovery support.

**Ensuring a Robust Substance Use Disorder Treatment Workforce**

The addiction crisis impacts millions of Americans. According to SAMHSA’s National Survey on Drug Use and Health: 2020, 14.9% of people aged 12 or older (41.1 million people) were classified as needing substance use treatment in the past year; however, only 1.4% (4.0 million people) received that treatment. These numbers are staggering and illustrate the clear demand for increased access to services.

With data showing that substance use and overdose deaths have been increasing in recent years, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we must continue our commitment to building and maintaining a strong addiction workforce that can help address our nation’s growing addiction crisis, which is impacting all facets of society, families, communities, the workforce, and more. Congress can help ensure a robust workforce by providing increased fiscal year 2023 appropriations for the following key programs:

- **Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) Block Grant**: This program provides infrastructure support for public-funded facilities. The SAPT Block Grant system of selection and disbursement is well established with a distribution plan in place. This makes for a more efficient and timelier mechanism for meeting the needs of the communities across the nation. For these reasons, increased funding through this vital mechanism is critical to meet the needs and broaden access to care.

- **Loan Repayment Program for Substance Use Disorder Treatment Workforce (STAR LRP)**: This program was established in 2018 by the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act (PL 115-271) to help incentivize students to pursue substance use disorder treatment professions by providing up to $250,000 toward student loan repayment.
Minority Fellowship Program: This program awards tuition support funding to individuals to support their education in an addictions-focused discipline in return for a commitment to work with minority and other underserved communities after graduation. Salaries in the addiction workspace are extremely low, so incentivizing education through tuition support is imperative for the creation of a stable workforce to meet the needs of underserved populations. NAADAC has worked over the past two decades to increase the diversity of the behavioral health workforce to improve prevention, wellness, and treatment for minority populations.

NAADAC also urges Congress to increase access to treatment for substance use disorders by allowing credentialed addiction counselors to be reimbursed under Medicare Part B and to perform these critical services in Rural Health Clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers serving underserved and vulnerable populations. Recognizing the education, training, and competencies of addiction counselors under Medicare Part B represents a common sense, critical point of access to services for so many in need and removes barriers to the development and retention of this vital workforce.

Reauthorize SAMHSA and HRSA’s Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Programs and Advance Mental Health Parity

It is essential that Congress reauthorize vital SAMHSA and HRSA mental health and substance use disorder programs, notably including the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial program and the SAPT Block Grant. NAADAC also strongly supports renaming the SAPT Block Grant as the “Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Services Block Grant”. It is also paramount that Congress enact reforms to give states the resources they need to enforce existing parity laws and also sunset the ability of self-funded, non-federal government health care plans that cover first responders, public school teachers, and other city and state workers to opt-out of protections provided by the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (Federal Parity Act).

Oppose Passage of the SAFE Banking Act (H.R. 1996/S. 910)

NAADAC opposes the SAFE Banking Act and does not support the legalization of cannabis. NAADAC finds no benefit to legalizing cannabis use since decriminalization alone will address many social injustices – specifically within the criminal justice system – and stimulate greater social change without the associated harm and cost. Legalization of cannabis and bills that support the cannabis industry, such as the SAFE Banking Act, cause this addictive drug to become more readily available, accessible, and affordable to the entire population, specifically vulnerable populations like those with predisposed addictive disorders and our nation’s youth.

We appreciate the steps that Congress has taken to address the needs of those suffering from substance use disorders and the workforce providing them with desperately needed care. We appreciate consideration of these priorities as the 117th Congress comes to a close and look forward to continuing to work with you to address substance use disorder challenges going forward. If we can be of any assistance, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me at cmorenotuohy@naadac.org or (301) 755-4256.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, BSW, NCAC II, CDC III, SAP Executive Director
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals