September 10, 2018

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader  Democratic Leader
United States Senate  United States Senate
The Capitol, S-230  The Capitol, S-221
Washington, DC 20510  Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Democratic Leader Schumer,

NAADAC, the Association of Addiction Professionals, thanks and commends the Senate for its efforts to advance meaningful legislation to address the opioid crisis. As you continue your work on the Opioid Crisis Response Act of 2018, we urge you to include provisions in a final legislative package that help ensure a robust addiction, treatment, and recovery workforce and maintain important patient privacy protections.

NAADAC is the largest global organization of professionals working in the field of addiction treatment and recovery. We represent more than 100,000 addiction counselors, educators, and addiction-focused health professionals around the world, including 47 domestic state-based affiliates. Our mission is to lead, unify, and empower addiction-focused professionals to achieve excellence through education, advocacy, and knowledge, standards of practice, ethics, professional development, and research.

Building a qualified and well-trained workforce to meet the challenging demands of substance use disorder (SUD) is critical to addressing this epidemic. We encourage you to adopt, in a Senate compromise bill, Section 7071 of House-passed H.R. 6, which includes the bipartisan Substance Use Disorder Workforce Loan Repayment Act. While we sincerely appreciate the Senate’s attention to loan forgiveness in its own draft, NAADAC believes Section 7071 more effectively meets the goal of recruiting and retaining a qualified and diverse SUD workforce.

Additionally, we urge the Senate to maintain its position with respect to the privacy rights of patients living with SUD. As you know, H.R. 6 would align regulations governing confidentiality of SUD treatment records (42 CFR Part 2, or “Part 2”) with HIPAA standards. NAADAC was disappointed to see the Overdose Prevention and Patient Safety Act included in H.R. 6 because we believe this measure would have many unintended consequences for the very population it seeks to help. In particular, NAADAC believes such an approach would discourage people from seeking SUD treatment over the perceived risk of unnecessary exposure of patient records and sensitive information.

The Senate bill takes a more pragmatic approach to this sensitive issue by requiring HHS to develop best practices for sharing substance use treatment information, when requested by the patient, in electronic health records. We thank the Senate for its thoughtful approach to this matter and encourage you to advocate strongly for it in any eventual Senate-House negotiated package.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to continuing to work together. Please feel free to contact me directly with any comments or questions you may have at cmorenotuohy@naadac.org or 301.755.4256.
Sincerely,

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

cc: The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
   The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
   The Honorable Orrin Hatch, Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
   The Honorable Ron Wyden, Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Finance