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**Energy and Commerce Committee Adopts Matsui/Engel Amendment to Revamp America's Mental Health Centers**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – The House Energy and Commerce Committee adopted an amendment introduced by Representatives Doris O. Matsui (D-CA) and Eliot L. Engel (D-NY) that will revamp America's mental health centers by updating the definition of Federally Qualified Behavioral Health Centers as part of the comprehensive health care legislation currently being considered by Congress. The Matsui/Engel amendment was included in the Omnibus Amendment offered by Health Subcommittee Chairman Frank Pallone in the House Energy and Commerce Committee last night, which passed by a unanimous vote.

The Matsui/Engel amendment strengthens America's current system of community mental health centers, which is a highly successful model even as it struggles for lack of funding. Currently, community-based mental health programs throughout the country help over 6 million adults, children, and families conquer mental illness and substance abuse disorders to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

"In my hometown of Sacramento, the County-operated mental health center recently stopped accepting new patients due to lack of funding even though the number of mentally ill keeps rising," said Matsui. "But by broadening the definition of Federally Qualified Behavioral Health Centers, the Sacramento center – in addition to centers across the country – finally will have a baseline off of which they can start re-building the community-based mental health system, and help millions of people with mental illness or substance abuse disorders all across the country."

"Improving our mental health delivery system is a critical part of health reform. Our amendment begins the process of establishing national standards of care for persons with serious mental illness and addiction disorder and will bring new reporting and accountability standards to mental health care in an effort to better integrate these providers and services within the larger healthcare system. New York State has one of the world's largest and most complex mental health systems, annually caring for approximately 688,000 New Yorkers, including over 140,000 children. Mental illness is the leading illness-related cause of disability, a major cause of death from suicide, and a driver of school failure, poor overall health, incarceration and homelessness. This amendment is a significant step along the path to caring for these citizens, and I will continue to work with my colleagues, such as Rep. Matsui, to bring additional improvements in the future," said Engel.

"Getting Federally Qualified Behavioral Health Center language into the health care reform legislation will lay the foundation for positioning community mental health providers to have access to many of the same benefits in federal law and programs as federally qualified health centers do," stated Rusty Selix, Executive Director of the California Council of Community

Mental Health Agencies, which is based in Sacramento. “There are so many problems our member agencies in Sacramento and throughout California face that this definition could help with. These include: restrictions in billing rates or covered services, limitations of what Medicaid will pay for, and the challenges in addressing the physical health needs of people with serve mental illness and children with serious emotional disturbance and their families.”

“The list of potential benefits from this definition is virtually unlimited,” Selix continued. “We know this took a lot of effort from Congresswoman Matsui personally and also from her staff, and we join in acknowledging this important achievement that will benefit community providers in Sacramento such as: Turning Point Community Programs, River Oak Center for Children, EMQ FamiliesFirst, El Hogar Community Services, Inc. and Transitional Living and Community Support, Inc.”

“The introduction of the FQBHC definition is a significant milestone in the history of community mental health centers, which have been largely ignored by the federal government after their creation in 1963,” said Linda Rosenberg, President and CEO of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare. “The National Council and our members have fought long and hard for this recognition and we are immensely grateful to Representatives Engel and Matsui who have helped reiterate that mental health and addictions are an integral part of health care.”

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