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Wednesday, June 20, 2012

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Matsui Introduces Legislation to Strengthen America's Community Mental Health Centers

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Today, Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA) introduced legislation to enhance Medicaid funding for organizations, clinics, and health centers that offer community-based treatment and support for millions of low-income and vulnerable people with mental health and addiction disorders. H.R. 5989, The Excellence in Mental Health Act, would establish a network of Federally Qualified Behavioral Health Centers (FQBHCs) across the country and provide these new FQBHCs with cost-based reimbursement through Medicaid. This legislation would provide critical resources and support to Sacramento's behavioral safety-net organizations that serve our most vulnerable citizens—those with serious mental illnesses.

“Community mental health and addiction providers have been ignored for far too long,” said Congresswoman Matsui. “It is time for mental health to be treated on a level playing field with the rest of our nation's healthcare system. The Federal government must step up and protect the mental health and addiction safety net, which has faced tremendous struggles, both in Sacramento and across the country.

“Investing in mental health and addiction treatment would save our economy billions of dollars that are currently spent on emergency room visits, incarceration, and lost productivity—many of which could have been prevented through a robust mental health infrastructure. Federal funding is the only way to protect against a further depletion of these essential services in Sacramento due to state budgetary constraints, which is why we need H.R. 5989.”

Rusty Selix, Executive Director of the Mental Health Association in California, stated that “the Excellence in Mental Health Act is an important advance in mental health policy taking

significant steps to eliminate one of the remaining areas of law in which programs providing mental health services are not treated the same as physical health providers serving the same populations. Defining and recognizing federally qualified behavioral health centers acknowledges that they are just as essential as federally qualified health centers. This will reduce the painful cycle of homelessness, incarceration and hospitalizations that is so common for people with mental illnesses who cannot get the community care that they need.”

Linda Rosenberg, President and CEO of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, added, “1 in 5 Americans has a mental illness. Although we have made great progress in eliminating some of the stigma surrounding mental illness, access to care is still a problem for too many of these patients. It’s time to end the discrimination. America must recognize that behavioral health is integral to overall health. We are grateful to Representative Matsui for leading the way with the Excellence in Mental Health Act.”

The Matsui legislation is supported by numerous mental health advocacy organizations including the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, and the Mental Health Association in California.

Representative Eliot Engel (D-NY) is also an original co-sponsor of the legislation.

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