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December 21, 2020

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Office of President-Elect Biden
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Re: Behavioral Health and Substance Use Disorder Crisis

Dear Mr. President-Elect:

Congratulations on your election as the 46th President of the United States, and best wishes to you and Senator Kamala Harris amid your preparations to lead our great nation. Please know that I am committed to assisting your Administration in any way possible while we work together to surmount the many challenges ahead.

I appreciate your ongoing plans to combat the opioid crisis, especially in regard to targeting federal funds at improving access to treatment for opioid and other substance use disorders. We need to remember that before the pandemic there was an epidemic of opioid overdose deaths and stagnant funding for behavioral health initiatives.

As chair of the New York State Senate Committee on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, and founding co-chair of the Joint Senate Task Force on Opioids, Addiction & Overdose Prevention, I see the carnage first hand every day. I strongly support the request for \$38.5 billion in incremental funding that was made earlier this year by the National Council for Behavioral Health and 40 other national groups addressing mental health and Substance Use Disorder. I respectfully urge you to make this a priority next year.

Without this financial support, numerous community behavioral health organizations and drug treatment programs will be unable to serve many of the country's most vulnerable individuals. Meanwhile, as reported recently in *The Washington Post*, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says that overdose deaths in the U.S. are "accelerating," with provisional data showing a 12.3% increase from last year—resulting in nearly 80,000 people lost to Substance Use Disorder.

I do not have to tell you that the number of overdose deaths in our country each year is a nationwide tragedy. And the only way to start mitigating this tragedy is with funding for direct payments to behavioral health organizations and treatment programs to ensure they can remain open and operating during the Covid-19 crisis and beyond.

Right now, too many mental health and Substance Use Disorder treatment centers around the country are at risk of having to close their doors. The emergency supplemental funding they would receive would be similar to that given to small businesses. Further, due to the economic crash, many patients have lost the ability to pay for their share of the costs of treatment. The funding would help stabilize the delivery of service to those who need it.

Programs for mental health services and substance use disorders have been under-resourced for too long. We need to create a new level of support, with the immediate \$38.5 billion assistance already requested, to prevent the collapse of treatment programs when they are needed most. At stake are the lives of our loved ones and neighbors.

Thank you for all of your efforts so far in preventing and treating Substance Use Disorder—and for considering emergency assistance to treatment providers and for making the fight against the opioid crisis a priority for your Administration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter B. Harckham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Peter" being the most prominent.

Peter B. Harckham
NY State Senate, 40th S.D.