

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 7, 2010

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

As you implement the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), we urge you to take the steps necessary to focus attention and resources on mental health screenings and early intervention for America's adolescents. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, approximately 11 percent of our nation's youth – or more than 4.5 million – suffer from serious mental illness that causes significant functional impairment in their daily lives. Suicide is the most tragic outcome of mental illness, and for youth between the age of 10 and 24 it is the third leading cause of death.

Notably, enactment of PPACA has provided the framework to increase early identification of mental illness that will improve outcomes and save lives. The new law contains a number of policies that, if implemented correctly, will expand access to annual mental health screenings for those ages 12 to 18. However, this change will only happen if the rules and regulations issued by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), necessary to fully implement the law, adhere to a consistent standard for comprehensive preventive services that includes annual mental health screening.

Specifically, we urge you to improve delivery of the Medicaid benefit prior to program expansion in 2014 to ensure that all beneficiaries between the age of 12 and 18 receive an annual mental health screen. Under current law, states are required through the Early & Periodic Screening & Diagnostic Treatment (EPSDT) benefit to provide access to annual medical assessments, including mental health assessments. Unfortunately, a 2010 report from the Office of the Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that nearly 60 percent of children across nine states who attended a Medicaid well-child visit were not offered a complete EPSDT assessment. The Department should expand quality reporting requirements to assess this service and issue guidance to states reasserting their obligation to provide coverage of annual mental health screens to comply with the requirements of the EPSDT benefit.

We also encourage you to make certain that coverage of an annual mental health screen for all youth age 12 to 18 is incorporated into the definition of preventive benefits that must be offered by new health plans and plans offered through the state-run health exchanges. Section

2713(a)(1) of PPACA requires all new plans to provide coverage of preventive services without cost sharing if the benefit is evidence-based and has received a rating of A or B from the USPSTF.

Sections 1302(b)(1)(E) and 1302(b)(1)(I) help establish the parameters of the essential health benefits for plans operating within the health exchanges, including mental health services and preventive services, respectively. As you implement these sections of law, we urge you to require all health plans to cover annual mental health screens for adolescents age 12 to 18.

We further request that existing workforce funding provided to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) be utilized to assist primary care providers who would like to integrate mental health care into their practices. On June 16, 2010, you announced the availability of \$250 million to strengthen the nation's primary care workforce. We urge you to dedicate a portion of this allocation to improve the capability of primary care providers to identify and treat mental health conditions.

Finally, we urge that you prioritize coverage of adolescent mental health screenings under activities authorized by Title IV of the act. Title IV, Subtitle A authorizes a number of important prevention-focused activities, including establishment of the Prevention and Public Health Fund, the National Prevention, Health Promotion and Public Health Council and a public education and outreach campaign focused on raising awareness about the value of preventive services. Recognizing that mental illness is a serious challenge to the overall health of our nation's youth, we urge you to identify adolescent mental health screens as a priority service for prevention activities.

We believe that the enactment of PPACA provides a unique opportunity to improve early identification of mental illness and provide appropriate services among our nation's young people. Establishing coverage of annual adolescent mental health screens is the first step forward in improving outcomes and saving lives. We look forward to working with you as you implement these critically important policies.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



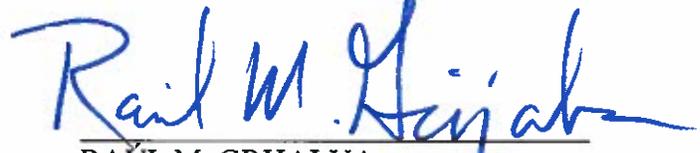
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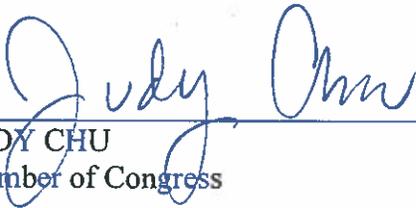
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