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April 17, 2023

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The Honorable Tina Smith
720 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maggie Hassan
324 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Smith, Murkowski and Hassan:

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the national medical specialty association representing more than 38,000 psychiatric physicians, I write to commend the introduction of your important legislation, the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act of 2023 (S. 462).

The increased need for mental health and substance use disorder (MH/SUD) services as a result of the pandemic has only exacerbated the significant workforce shortages facing our country. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) estimates that by 2025, there will be a shortage of over 250,000 mental health professionals, including psychiatrists, mental health and substance abuse social workers, clinical and school psychologists, and school counselors.¹ These shortages are especially pronounced in rural and underserved areas, including federally designated mental health professional shortage areas (HPSA) where nearly 160 million Americans presently reside.²

The gap between need and access is particularly acute for psychiatry, with more than half of U.S. counties lacking a single psychiatrist³. Unfortunately, the delta between demand and access for psychiatric services only figures to grow in the coming years with projections showing the country will be short between 14,280 and 31,109 psychiatrists by 2025.⁴ To establish a robust workforce trained to meet our country's current and future MH/SUD needs, we must act now.

APA stands ready to assist you in support of this timely and much-needed effort. As your legislation moves forward, we also respectfully ask that you consider making a modest clarification to the bill's language related to eligibility for private loan forgiveness. Attached please find our suggested modification to the definition of eligible loans under section c, which would ensure that psychiatrists and other

¹ <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/data-research/behavioral-health-2013-2025.pdf>

² <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/growing-psychiatrist-shortage-enormous-demand-mental-health-services>

³ https://behavioralhealthworkforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Y3-FA2-P2-Psych-Sub_Full-Report-FINAL2.19.2019.pdf

⁴ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29540118/>

physicians can also have private loans forgiven, consistent with the opportunity afforded to other MH providers.

Thank you for your continued leadership. Please let us know how we can support your efforts to enact this important legislation. If you have any questions, please contact Trip Stanford at dstanford@psych.org / (315) 706-4582.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Saul Levin" with "M.D., M.P.A." written in smaller letters to the right. There is a horizontal line under the name "Levin".

Saul M. Levin, M.D., M.P.A., FRCP-E
Chief Executive Officer & Medical Director