Dear Representatives Bass, Issa, Trone, and Chabot:

Thank you for championing America’s mental health. The undersigned national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and substance use treatment providers, advocates, and payers committed to strengthening access to mental health care and substance use treatment write to voice our strong support for H.R.8637, the Law Enforcement De-Escalation Training Act. We are grateful for your ongoing commitment to our country’s public safety officers and to improving behavioral health crisis response.

This legislation comes at a moment of crisis in American life. According to CDC data, from August 2020 to February of 2021, over 4 in 10 adults reported experiencing anxiety or depression.1 From 2009 to 2019, the number of high school students reporting feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased by 40%, the number of those seriously considering suicide increased by 36%, and the share of high school students creating a suicide plan increased by 44%.ii Nearly one in twenty American adults (4.9%) report having had serious thoughts of suicide in the last year.iii Providing law enforcement with tools and resources to handle these mental health crises is a common-sense solution to supporting our officers and first responders while they carry out their duty of protecting the public, as 6 to 10% of encounters with law enforcement involve individuals dealing with a mental illness.iv

As you know, the Law Enforcement De-Escalation Training Act will direct the U.S. Attorney General to develop training curricula to help educate law enforcement officers and covered mental health professionals about how best to respond to behavioral health crises. Such curricula will be developed with the goal of promoting awareness of de-escalation tactics, alternatives to use of force, and best practices to safely respond to an individual experiencing a mental health or suicidal crisis.

Through the existing Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program, this legislation will help state and local law enforcement agencies train public safety officers to respond to mental health or suicidal crises. This training will place an emphasis on scenario-based exercises, testing, and follow-up evaluative assessments to ensure that officers have the simulated experiences needed to respond in real-life situations appropriately and effectively. It also encourages collaboration between law enforcement units, local mental health organizations, and healthcare services to better integrate and plan training programs, and establishes pathways for evaluating what works.

Law enforcement are a key partner in ensuring that every person experiencing a mental health or suicidal crisis is connected to the care they need. Training officers to identify and de-escalate crises while avoiding use of force will help improve outcomes for crisis situations. It is for these reasons that we give H.R.8637 our strong support.
We respectfully urge the swift passage of H.R.8637, and we look forward to continuing to work with you and your colleagues to improve public safety responses to behavioral health crises.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom
American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists
American Association on Health and Disability
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare (AABH)
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association for Children’s Behavioral Health
National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families
National Network of Depression Centers
RI International
Sandy Hook Promise

cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives
    The Honorable Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives

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3 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2021.) 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health Annual National Report.