

December 12, 2013

**MEMBERS**American Psychological  
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and Wellness

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Behavioral Health DirectorsNational Association of  
Psychiatric Health SystemsNational Association of  
Social WorkersNational Council for Community  
Behavioral HealthcareThe Jewish Federations of  
North America

Netsmart

The Honorable Rob Portman

SR-448 Russell Senate Office Bldg.

Washington, D.C. 20510-3506

Dear Senator Portman:

The undersigned organizations are writing to express our strong support for the Portman Behavioral Health Information Technology Coordination Act Amendment to legislation repealing the Medicare Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) System. Your proposal builds on strong bipartisan support in both the House and Senate for including Community Mental Health Centers, psychiatric hospitals, clinical psychologists and addiction providers in the HITECH Act.

The HITECH Act jumpstarted a process for standards adoption and initiated new privacy and security protections; the measure also created financial incentives for the adoption, use, and maintenance of HIT nationwide. However, HIT adoption is hindered when clinicians treating patients with medical/surgical diseases are equipped with HIT while, at the very same time, providers serving people with often life-threatening behavioral health conditions operate with older clinical systems.

Low income Americans with serious mental health and addiction disorders would particularly benefit from approval of the Portman amendment because they have a strikingly high incidence of comorbid cirrhosis, heart disease, diabetes and asthma. HIT makes it possible to coordinate care for this patient population across behavioral health, primary care, and specialty medicine. In addition, a recent Avalere Health study of both S. 1517 and S. 1685 demonstrates Medicare and Medicaid savings by avoiding adverse drug-to-drug interaction and averting emergency room visits and hospital admissions.

Sen. Portman, the Behavioral IT Coalition appreciates your outstanding leadership on this important matter. We will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you as the SGR legislative process unfolds in the Senate Finance Committee and on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

Sincerely,

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

American Psychological Association

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National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems

National Council for Behavioral Health

The Jewish Federations of North America

Netsmart Technologies