July 24, 2017

The Honorable Cory Gardner  
354 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Gardner,

The Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council (CBHC) envisions a state where all people have the opportunity to lead healthy and meaningful lives. Our 28 member organizations represent a network of integrated care providers and managers serving all 64 Colorado counties, including 17 Community Mental Health Centers, 5 Behavioral Health Organizations, 4 Managed Services Organizations, and 2 specialty health clinics. Together, we strengthen communities with innovative care supporting the health, wellbeing and safety of all Coloradans.

I am writing to express our members’ concern with elements of the Better Care Reconciliation Act (BRCA) and other health reform efforts. The proposed plan to repeal the Affordable Care Act would greatly threaten Colorado’s health care system and harm those individuals that suffer from mental illness and addiction. The combination of the provisions in the Affordable Care Act that require mental health and substance use in the essential health benefits, and to allow states to expand Medicaid, has created an unprecedented increase in access to services. In the Community Mental Health Center System alone, the number of unique clients served has increased by 159% in nine years, and by almost 31% in the past two years.

CBHC agrees with the goal to improve affordability in healthcare, but reducing the federal commitment to help Colorado citizens afford healthcare will leave millions uninsured, underinsured, or priced out of coverage. At a time when the citizens of this state are enduring epidemic challenges with suicide and opioid misuse, it is critical to not reduce access to care or eliminate vital health plan benefits. The impacts of untreated behavioral health disorders are felt across every part the community. Depression alone costs local businesses billions of dollars annually. Without adequate mental health treatment, Colorado children face reduced educational attainment, lower earning potential, and are at a higher risk of engagement in the criminal justice system.

CBHC strongly opposes eliminating, or severely restricting, Medicaid expansion and opposes the proposed refinancing of Medicaid allotments, the reduction in availability to payment assistance, and the shifting of costs onto states, providers and consumers. Investment in the Medicaid program improves outcomes for individuals with mental health and addictions issues, which saves taxpayer
dollars overall. We know that when people have access to a robust continuum of services in their communities, we can prevent them from getting sicker and ending up in high cost emergency departments, jails, and other social service programs. Reduced federal match rates, heavy penalties for coverage gaps on states and consumers, and per capita or block grant financing would dangerously limit resources that serve Colorado citizens.

CBHC also strongly opposes changes to the essential health benefit requirements. It is critical that addiction and mental illness services be covered on par with other medical conditions consistent with the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA). Protections for mental health parity, such as essential health benefit requirements in Medicaid, ensure millions have access to needed care. Losing coverage for these services would negatively impact access and care with cascading negative impacts on Coloradans’ health and wellness.

CBHC will oppose any health reform plan that leaves Coloradans without crucial services and that places unrealistic pressures on the state to manage the dire consequences. Our members hope you will work to ensure the BRCA is amended to include protections for behavioral health services in Medicaid plans, a clear safety net for individuals who will lose coverage, and a detailed plan to assist states in absorbing the costs of healthcare.

Please join us in opposition to the BCRA in its current form and in advocacy for protections that keep all Colorado communities healthy.

Sincerely,

Doyle Forrestal
Chief Executive Officer
Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council