This is an adaptable draft of a letter I would like to see go out to each and every one of our Florida Congressmen regarding HR 3032.

Regional Directors: Please advise chapter leaders to provide a copy of this letter to their local members and email to their representative. We must continue to apply pressure to get their attention!

In advance:

Thank you.

Dear

I am writing to you not only as a constituent but also as a licensed mental health professional in Florida where Medicare recipients are severely impacted by a decided shortage of Mental Health Professionals.

**HR 3032**, *The Mental Health Access Improvement Act of 2017*,has been introduced in the House of Representatives. It currently has 23 co-sponsors, none of whom represent Florida. How can this be? Especially in a state that is home to an ever-increasing number of senior citizens, most of whom use Medicare.

# **Here are a few facts to consider:**

# **Florida ranks 14th nationwide in suicide rates among the elderly.**

# We face a Mental Health Crisis of great proportion among the current and projected numbers of Medicare Beneficiaries whose demands for Mental Health care will rise exponentially with the aging population.

An estimated 18 to 25 percent of Medicare Beneficiaries are in need of mental health care. In the wake of Hurricane Irma, displaced seniors, face a high risk of Depression, Anxiety, Adjustments to drastic change, while having limited access to qualified mental health providers to assist in navigating their trauma.

To put it more precisely, of the total number of qualified, licensed mental health providers in this state, victims of Hurricane Irma have access to less than a third of those. The reason for this is that when the regulations were promulgated in 1974, the only mental health providers were Social Workers. Since that time, Clinical Mental Health Counselling and Marriage and Family Therapy have become well established as highly qualified providers of mental health services. Add to that, in Florida, the Mental Health Counselor profession is the fastest growing of the three professions in this state.

Keep in mind that Florida ranks 49th of 50 states in what it spends toward mental wellness.

Many Medicare beneficiaries live in areas designated by the Health Resources and Services Administration as *mental health professional shortage areas*. Most of those practitioners who are Medicare Mental Health Providers live in the metropolitan areas, not the less populated areas where the need is greatest.

Similar bills with the same language have passed the Republican-majority Senate in 2003 and 2005, and the Democratic-majority House in 2007 and 2009. It is expected that Senators Barrasso and Stabenow will be introducing a similar bill.

Congressman \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ please co-sponsor HR 3032, *The Mental Health Access Improvement Act of 2017* to ensure that your senior constituents have full access to Mental Health services, especially now.

With best regards,