



January 31, 2013

The Honorable  
Ami Bera  
United States House of Representatives  
1408 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

CHAIRPERSON  
John Ryan

EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
Jane Adcock

Re: Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) H.R. 274 - SUPPORT

Dear Congressman Bera:

The California Mental Health Planning Council (CMHPC) is mandated by federal and state statute to advocate on behalf of children with serious emotional disturbance and adults with serious mental illness. We also advise state and federal administrations and legislators on impacts and successful practices in mental health services.

ADVOCACY

EVALUATION

INCLUSION

We are writing to express our strong support of the Mental Health First Aid Bill (H.R. 274) sponsored by Congressman Ron Barber, and to request that you co-sponsor and/or support it too. There is more and more recognition lately of the pervasiveness and need for early, preventative services for mental health and wellness. Unfortunately, recognizing it is not the same as engaging with somebody and addressing it in a way that does not create shame or embarrassment for a person in need of reassurance and advice.

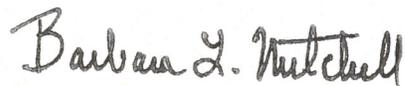
As with any other aspect of public health, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. H.R. 274 would authorize \$20 million in grants for the education and training on Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) to community members having direct interaction and an early opportunity to identify the need and refer for services in a way that does not increase isolation and stigma for the person in crisis.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a public education program that helps people identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The course trains participants in a 5-step action plan to recognize the signs/symptoms of mental illness, respond to a person in crisis and direct them to professional help. This program has received widespread endorsement and praise internationally and in the US. The National Institute of Mental Health is funding a multi-year study on MHFA's efficacy at decreasing barriers to self-referral for services by college students. We have Council members who train on this technique and praise its effectiveness based on their direct observations of the experience and outcomes.

Providing first responders, teachers, primary care professionals, and others with a toolkit that lays out a method for reaching out and guiding a person to the help that is needed, nonjudgmentally, and with confidence, is an invaluable skill that will give back tenfold on its investment. Empowering people to provide meaningful assistance will go a long way to eliminating stigma once people are comfortable offering help to somebody who might want it.

The Council thanks you for your service and appreciates this opportunity to provide you with information on how mental health services can be improved in the United States. We strongly support this legislation and ask for your sponsorship and legislative support of this important training program.

Sincerely,



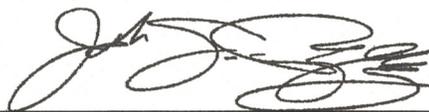
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Barbara Mitchell, Co-Chair  
CMHPC Advocacy Committee



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Gail Nickerson, Co-Chair  
CMHPC Advocacy Committee



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John Ryan, Chair  
California Mental Health Planning Council

cc: The Honorable:  
Ron Barber, US House of Representatives  
California Delegation to the House of Representatives  
Dianne Feinstein, US Senate  
Barbara Boxer, US Senate  
Governor Edmund G. Brown  
Darrell Steinberg, California Senate President Pro Tempore  
Richard Van Horn, Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission  
Chair  
Kirsten Barlow, California Mental Health Directors Association Associate Director of  
Legislation and Public Policy