**DRAFT LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (Choose one and personalize)**

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Dear Editor: [218 words]

Pennsylvania’s behavioral health system has done tremendous good for Pennsylvania families by delivering needed, even lifesaving, mental health and drug and alcohol services, and ensuring specialized care is easily accessed at the local level.

Despite this ongoing success, there is an effort in Harrisburg to fix what, quite frankly, is not broken by merging behavioral health with the larger statewide physical health system and network. The plan, while perhaps well intentioned, would actually jeopardize the ability to deliver integrated, coordinated, local care and potentially adversely impact the services available to 2.9 million Pennsylvanians.

The reality is Pennsylvania’s behavioral health system is stable and access to care has greatly increased over the last 20 years. Over this time there has been the addition and expansion of needed services, the development of supplemental services, and use of reinvestment dollars for new programs. There also has been a true focus on those with special needs such as adults with serious mental illness and children with serious emotional disturbance and autism.

The state’s behavioral health system not only works well for the people who need these services; it also benefits taxpayers, making it the fiscally prudent choice. The system has consistently demonstrated cost savings since its implementation two decades ago. All the reason more this successful program should be continued and supported.

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Dear Editor: [224 words]

Legislation advancing in Harrisburg would reverse 20 years of progress that our state has made in delivering lifesaving mental health, drug and alcohol services.

The measure would turn over these services to large health care managed care organizations, in some instances, national for-profit corporations, stripping it away from local county leaders and companies that specialize in treating people with mental health or substance abuse challenges.

Nearly all the organizations that advocate for those who receive behavioral health care oppose it, as do we.

The plain fact is that the current Behavioral HealthChoices program works extremely well – for the people who need these services and all taxpayers.

Twenty years ago, behavioral health care was “carved out” from physical health care for good reason. Before this new model was created, at least half of the taxpayer funds sent to a managed care organization that was intended for behavioral health services did not reach the consumer.

Instead, it became part of the company’s profit margin. Pennsylvanians needed behavioral health services became the poor step-child of the system. As a result, people with serious behavioral health disorders did not have access to the care they needed.

By carving out those services, we have been able to make real progress in integrating care with medical professionals who provide physical health care without sacrificing behavioral health care access and quality.

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Dear Editor: [161 words]

Don’t fix what isn’t broken. But that’s exactly what’s happening in Harrisburg with legislation to remove local control from the behavioral health system.

For the last 20 years, Pennsylvania’s behavioral health system has delivered needed, even lifesaving, mental health and drug and alcohol services to patients and families in need. That care has been easily accessed at the local level.

But a new plan in Harrisburg would turn over these services to large health care managed care organizations, affecting care available to 2.9 million Pennsylvanians who need help with mental health or substance abuse challenges, for example.

This legislative effort runs counter to trends. The current program has been applauded by advocates and used as an example nationwide.

Real progress has been made integrating care with physical health care without sacrificing the needed focus on behavioral health care access and quality.

Pennsylvania’s behavioral health program has improved access to services, increased choice, and decreased cost. It should be applauded, not dismantled.