**DRAFT LEGISLATIVE LETTERS (Choose one and personalize)**

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Dear Representative/Senator [Last Name]:

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. I have worked with people who benefitted from these local programs, and I’m very worried about the implications House Bill 335 and Senate Bill 268 could have on Behavioral HealthChoices if they advance through the legislature.

Despite this ongoing success of Pennsylvania’s local programs and services, there is an effort in Harrisburg to fix what, quite frankly, is not broken. The proposed legislation would merge 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.

[Insert personal experiences with BHC]

* Do you have a loved one who accessed programs?
* Can you tell a story of the changes you’ve seen from a family member/client/patient?
* Can you demonstrate how BHC is effectively implemented locally?
* How have you been able to connect those in need with services?
* What do you see as the tangible benefits of managing services locally?
* Can you indicate how many people you work with who would lose easy access to these programs by merging behavioral with physical health?
* Can you talk about how physical health care works in tandem with behavioral health?

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.

Individuals, families, organizations and businesses across the commonwealth are sharing concerns about House Bill 335 and Senate Bill 268. If permitted to advance, the changes to our behavioral health system will be detrimental, and the legislation will most affect those in need of critical assistance. I implore you, on behalf of 2.9 million Pennsylvanians, to oppose HB 335 and SB 268.

Sincerely,

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Dear Representative/Senator [Last Name]:

I’m concerned about the legislation advancing in Harrisburg that would reverse 20 years of progress our state has made in delivering lifesaving mental health, drug and alcohol services.

House Bill 335 and Senate Bill 268 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.

[Include personal experience with BHC]

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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.

I have seen the benefits of Behavioral HealthChoices and the positive impacts these services have on the lives of individuals and their families. Allowing House Bill 335 and Senate Bill 268 to advance through the legislature will be detrimental to the 2.9 million Pennsylvanians this program benefits. Please consider joining me and numerous advocacy organizations in opposing the HB 335 and SB 268.

Sincerely,

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Dear Representative/Senator [Last Name]: [161 words]

I’m concerned that state legislators are trying to fix what isn’t broken by removing 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 House Bill 335 and Senate Bill 268 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. Behavioral HealthChoices has been applauded by advocates and used as an example nationwide.

[Add personal experience with BHC]

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* Can you talk about how physical health care works in tandem with behavioral health?

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. I’m asking for your support in continuing Behavioral HealthChoices by opposing House Bill 335 and Senate Bill 268.

Sincerely,