



September 9, 1999

The Honorable Charlie Norwood
U.S. House of Representatives
1707 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Norwood:

I am writing on behalf of the American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA), to express our strong support for H.R. 2723, the Bipartisan Consensus Managed Care Improvement Act. As president of AMHCA, and a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in private practice, I want to commend you for introducing this strong patient protection legislation.

AMHCA, with more than 6,000 members, is the largest professional organization exclusively representing the mental health counseling profession. Our members practice in a variety of settings, including hospitals, community mental health centers, managed behavioral health care organizations, employee assistance plans, substance abuse treatment centers, and private practice. The Georgia Licensed Professional Counselors Association (GLPCA), a state chapter of AMHCA, represents the interests of mental health counselors practicing in the state.

Currently, 45 states and the District of Columbia license or certify mental health counselors to independently provide mental health services, including the diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders. According to the recent report, *"Mental Health, United States, 1998"* published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), there are more than 96,000 professional counselors licensed or certified for independent practice in the United States.

AMHCA supports the strong patient protections included in H.R. 2723, including those provisions to establish a timely and effective internal and external appeals process, and those allowing direct access to specialists, including mental health providers. In particular, we applaud the inclusion of the provision to prohibit health plans from discriminating against providers based on license, location, or patient base. This provision, long supported by AMHCA, will offer the public greater choice among

providers, allowing them to choose professionals with the training and expertise best suited to address their needs. In addition, we are pleased with the inclusion of language to require the managed care industry to develop a standard form for claims submission, and the requirement that claims be paid in a timely manner.

Managed care reform is an issue of critical importance to the millions of Americans enrolled in such plans, and to health care professionals providing their care. As the House begins to debate patient protection legislation, AMHCA is hopeful that the bipartisan spirit shown by you and your colleagues in introducing H.R. 2723, will prevail throughout this debate.

Again, thank you for the leadership you have shown in introducing this important legislation. If I can be of any assistance to you as you work towards passage of H.R. 2723, please feel free to contact me at 248-689-7798. Beth Powell, AMHCA's Director of Public Policy and Legislation, is also available to you and your staff at 703-548-6002, ext. 105.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marion Turowski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "M".

Marion Turowski, LPC, NCC
President

c: Linda Painter, President, Georgia Licensed Professional Counselors Association