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Legislation to Include Marriage & Family Therapists in Medicare Headed to the President

San Diego, CA – The California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT) is celebrating the momentous passage of the Mental Health Access Improvement Act within the Omnibus bill, which includes Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) as Medicare providers.

"Access to mental health services is vital to the health and wellbeing of our communities, and without Marriage and Family Therapists, these services would be limited," said Representative Mike Thompson. "I am proud that my legislation to make Medicare cover mental health services provided by counselors and Marriage and Family Therapists was included in the government funding bill. This permanent expansion will ensure broad access to care for communities across the country, and I look forward to seeing more Americans take advantage of these mental health services."

The mental health data for elders is sobering, with one-in-four suffering from mental illness or substance use disorder. The problem is compounded by economic and racial disparities, a growing senior population, and the COVID pandemic; with some studies showing only 4 - 20% of elderly Americans needing mental health support being able to access a therapist. This legislation will add over 200,000 mental health clinicians to the Medicare workforce, allowing increased access to desperately needed mental healthcare.

"We are in the midst of a mental health crisis, and we applaud Congress for taking this important action to help meet the mental health needs of our elderly and all those utilizing Medicare. The bipartisan passage of this bill shows a commitment by Congress to embrace the role of MFTs in addressing a shortage of skilled therapists for Medicare beneficiaries. This is a momentous day for mental health," expressed CAMFT Executive Director Joy Alafia.

MFTs are extensively trained mental health clinicians who comprise 55% of the behavioral health workforce in California, providing psychotherapy to individuals, couples, families and groups and working with people struggling with mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and PTSD. This legislation is critical to ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries have access to adequate mental health care, especially those in rural areas. If signed into law, the bill will allow the coverage of MFT services under part B of the Medicare program, providing a significant influx of trained and licensed mental health providers into the Medicare system, effective January 1, 2024.

Rep. Mike Thompson, Rep. John Katko, Senator John Barrasso, Senator Debbie Stabenow, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the entire Medicare Mental Health Workforce Coalition are recognized for their outstanding leadership and dedication to mental health access.

ABOUT THE CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF MARRIAGE & FAMILY THERAPISTS

CAMFT is an independent professional organization representing the interests of over 35,000 Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) who are experts in diagnosing and treating mental health issues for any person who seeks therapy. CAMFT is dedicated to promoting mental health, advancing the MFT

profession, maintaining high standards of professional ethics and expanding awareness for the profession of marriage and family therapists.

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