



October 4, 2022

The Honorable Tom Wolf
225 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf:

On behalf of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, representing all 67 counties in the commonwealth, I write today to share our support for the recommendations of the Behavioral Health Commission for Mental Health. Our counties urge the General Assembly to act swiftly in the remaining days left in this legislation to enact the enabling legislation needed to allocate the \$100 million in federal funds so that the investment can quickly begin making a difference in the lives of our residents.

At the same time, we strongly support the Commission's call for flexibility in the use of mental health funds, understanding "each county has unique strengths and challenges." It is only because of the flexibility of the county mental health base funding that counties have been able to sustain services at the level they have and serve people in the most effective way possible, despite the lack of consistent financial support for those services.

In addition to direct services, counties have identified other areas where funding could help to support the mental health system. For instance, counties have shared if they had received an increase in mental health funding, they would address specific targeted needs they see for children's mental health and older adult mental health, crisis intervention and capacity, peer supports and other diversion services. Programs that focus on the wraparound needs of clients, particularly housing and other community supports like job searches, are a need that have also been consistently reiterated across the commonwealth.

Counties could make excellent use of the funding as recommended by the Commission, to begin making key investments that will help shore up the behavioral health system in a holistic way. And these are only a handful of the examples that counties have shared, but they clearly illustrate that once the General Assembly approves, and the Governor signs, a bill to formally allocate the \$100 million in federal funds, counties stand ready to move quickly to get these funds invested where they really matter – in our communities and the people of Pennsylvania. However, for the funding to have the maximum impact, the House, Senate and administration must work with counties to craft legislation that will effectively implement the recommendations in the Behavioral Health Commission's report by retaining flexibility for counties to address local needs.

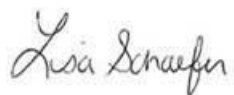
Finally, counties strongly support the Commission's recognition that an increase in the county base funds in future state budgets remains critical as without guaranteed funds, counties will be cautious about adding services that cannot be sustained once the federal dollars have been spent. Counties' chief goal for this \$100 million investment is that these funds go to support adult mental health services in ways that will have a positive impact without creating unsustainable ongoing obligations. We reiterate the Commission's emphasis that while these dollars can absolutely have a positive impact in the absence of increased General Fund support for county mental health, they are one-time funds and not a long-term solution.

Counties ask for a commitment from the General Assembly, and both the outgoing and incoming administrations, to increase county base funds on a year-over-year basis until counties and the state can fully serve residents of the commonwealth needing mental health services. After all, counties provide mental health services to commonwealth residents on behalf of the state, and therefore, we must fulfill this obligation in partnership.

We cannot properly address depression, anxiety, autism, substance abuse and a variety of other issues without substantial support from this Commission and the General Assembly, the Governor and the administration going forward. We look forward to working with you and our colleagues across the state to better serve our residents, our shared constituents, throughout the Commonwealth.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. If you have any questions, please contact CCAP executive director Lisa Schaefer, lschaefer@pacounties.org, or CCAP deputy executive director Brinda Penyak, bpenyak@pacounties.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lisa Schaefer". The ink is dark and the signature is written in a fluid, personal style.