

April 23, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

We are extremely concerned about cuts that have been made to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Administration on Community Living (ACL), together with the [planned HHS reorganization](#). This reorganization would fold SAMHSA into one agency together with agencies that perform largely unrelated functions such as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. It would dismantle ACL and fold its functions into the Administration for Children and Families, the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

SAMHSA plays a critical role in advancing community mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) services. It builds on the legacy for which your family laid the foundation in the Community Mental Health Act of 1963. In 1992, in a reorganization signed into law by President Bush, Congress separated SAMHSA from the National Institute of Mental Health and other research agencies in order to ensure a clear focus on guiding community-based mental health and SUD services. We are concerned that SAMHSA's key role will be undermined with the reorganization and staffing cuts to SAMHSA.

Cuts to nearly all staff in the director's office of SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) have raised alarm about the prospect that CMHS's work may be severely diminished, including the administration of the [Community Mental Health Services Block Grant](#), which currently serves over 8.5 million children and adults across the country. Without the work of CMHS, which is [directed by Congress](#), state mental health service systems would look radically different than they do today. While Medicaid is the primary funder of community mental health services, CMHS has guided what those services look like. CMHS has been a critical source of proven practices, providing state mental health systems with guidance about successful intensive community services, such as toolkits on [supported housing](#), [assertive community treatment](#), and [supported employment](#), guidance on [peer support services](#), [national crisis services guidelines](#), and resources on [intensive care coordination for children and youth](#). These services form the building blocks of modern mental health service systems. Before the advent of these services, service systems relied heavily on hospitalization, offering primarily late-stage interventions, with high costs to taxpayers, poor outcomes, and low quality of life. Even today, overreliance on

psychiatric hospitals, nursing facilities, and adult care facilities continues in too many places, and CMHS's continued work is key.

Deep cuts to the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ) threaten to eliminate the annual data collection on mental health and substance use disorder treatment required by Congress—the [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#). This large survey is used for many important purposes, including by state and local health, mental health, and substance use agencies to assess the potential need for treatment services, design programs that fit the needs of their populations served, and develop appropriate funding strategies and prevention measures.

SAMHSA plays a leading role in addressing the nation's substance use disorders including those that co-occur with mental health disabilities. This work is particularly critical in light of the continuing opioid epidemic. SAMHSA also funds and guides the operations of the 988 national suicide and crisis line, in accordance with legislation signed into law by President Trump. While we are encouraged that the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) and the 988 & Behavioral Health Crisis Coordinating Office have not sustained cuts, it remains to be seen how those portions of SAMHSA will be able to discharge their key responsibilities when SAMHSA is folded into the Administration for a Healthy America.

ACL also plays an important role for people with mental health disabilities, including people with co-occurring intellectual and developmental disabilities. It was created to coordinate efforts to advance independence and inclusion of older adults and people with disabilities. The agency funds key community services for older adults and people with disabilities that are provided by community-based organizations such as independent living centers, as well as research, education, and innovation. It oversees the Developmental Disabilities Councils, adult protective services, and many other key programs that enable people with disabilities and older adults to succeed and thrive in their communities. ACL's role is critical to ensuring compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act's integration mandate and the Supreme Court's decision in [Olmstead v. L.C.](#) Between the cuts to half of ACL's staff and the shift of its functions to agencies that are seemingly unsuited to conduct many of those functions, we are extremely concerned that ACL's mission, which [Congress directed through a number of authorizing statutes](#), can no longer be achieved.

We urge you to ensure that critically important functions of SAMHSA and ACL, including those identified above, continue as required by law. Accordingly, we urge you to reconsider the steep staffing cuts that have been made to these critical agencies and to ensure that any reorganization allows these functions to be conducted effectively by people with appropriate knowledge and expertise, with sufficient staffing and funding.

Sincerely,

Access Ready Inc.
Alliance for Rights and Recovery
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists
American Mental Health Counselors Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
American Association on Health and Disability
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Public Representation
Deaf Equality
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
Gould Farm
Inseparable
Lakeshore Foundation
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Directors
National Association of Social Workers
National Association for Rights Protection and Advocacy
National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery
National Council on Independent Living
National Federation of Families
National Health Law Program
National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse
Perkins School for the Blind
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network
Western Youth Services

Cc: Hon. Mike Johnson, Hon. Hakim Jeffries, Hon. John Thune, Hon. Charles Schumer