# AAA Committee Recommendation Report Report to the AAA Board

Report prepared by: Angela Velasquez	261-9700	Date: 7 October 2019
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From: ☐ Access Committee ☒ Legislative/Advocacy Committee ☐ Nutrition/Wellness Committee

#### **History/Related Actions**

At the 9/25/19 Legislative/Advocacy Committee meeting, the Mental Health Access Improvement Act (S. 286/H.R. 945) was discussed:

AAA Manager Cheryl Batterman has participated in two national conference calls as part of the Medicare Mental Health Workforce regarding the Mental Health Access Improvement Act of 2019 (Senate Bill 286 and HR Bill 945), which seeks to expand coverage of mental health services under Part B of Medicare. Specifically, the bill would amend the Social Security Act to increase access to mental health services by permitting Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists to be reimbursed by Medicare. The Medicare Mental Health Workforce is seeking local stakeholders to write letters of support for the legislation.

A motion was made by BUNCK, seconded by MCHONE, to recommend the AAA Board send a letter supporting the passage of Senate Bill 286 and HR Bill 945 to the state's congressional delegation. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aves 5 – BUNCK, CASTANEDA, LEZOTTE, MCHONE, OLSON

Absent 3 - KAUD, KRETSCHMAN, SCHMIDLKOFER

#### Financial/Budget/Other Resource Implications (if any)

None to Dane County

#### Recommendations

To approve the attached draft letter concerning the Mental Health Access Improvement Act (S. 286/H.R. 945).

#### **Attachments**

None

## **DRAFT Mental Health Letter**

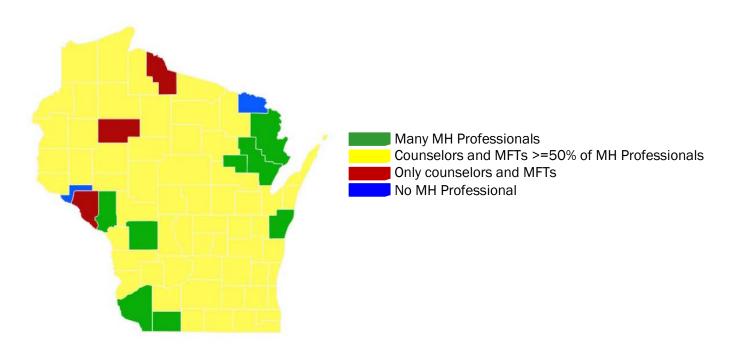
### TO: Congressman Pocan and Senators Baldwin & Johnson

The Area Agency on Aging of Dane County is one of America's national network of 622 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). Using a variety of funds from the Older Americans Act, state and local governments, and private foundations, we contract with community-based organizations to provide programs and services for persons who are 60 years of age or older. These include a range of services to support aging in place, such as case management, home-delivered and congregate meals, legal advocacy, family caregiver support, and evidence-based classes to promote healthy aging.

The Dane County Area Agency on Aging Board of Directors endorse the bipartisan Mental Health Access Improvement Act (S. 286/H.R. 945). This Legislation would permit Mental Health Counselors (MHCs) and Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) to become eligible Medicare Part B providers. Access to treatment is in critical shortage, in part because Medicare now only covers treatment provided in hospital settings or by Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs).

10,000 baby boomers a day qualify for Medicare. There are 3,000 areas in the country that are considered "mental-health-professional-shortage areas." 50% of rural counties do not have a single practicing psychiatrist, psychologist, or social worker. People who depend on Medicare often wait years before receiving appropriate treatment and often must travel great distances to get it.

As this map of "Wisconsin—Medicare Mental Health Professionals by County" from the National Provider Identification data file indicates, mental health professionals in Dane County make up less than half of the total number of MFTs and MHCs. In fact, there are six counties in Wisconsin that have only MFTs and MHCs available or no mental health professionals available to community members.



It is understood that dollars are limited; but it is unwise to spend the majority of Medicare's mental health funding on expensive inpatient care while providing insufficient lower-cost services in the community. One way to effectively increase outpatient mental health services is to expand the classification of eligible providers to include MFTs and MHCs.

We strongly urge your support for the passage of S. 286/H.R. 945

cc: The Honorable Tony Evers, Governor, State of Wisconsin
State Elected Officials (representing Dane County)
Members, Dane County Board of Supervisors
The Honorable Joe Parisi, Dane County Executive
Ms. Shawn Tessmann, Director, Dane County Department of Human Services