March 26, 2019

The Honorable John Barrasso  The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senate  United States Senate  
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building 731 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Barrasso and Senator Stabenow:

On behalf of our nearly 38 million members in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories, AARP is pleased to endorse the bipartisan Mental Health Access Improvement Act (S. 286). AARP is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, nationwide organization that strengthens communities and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities and protection from financial abuse.

Your legislation, S. 286, would provide for coverage of mental health counselor and marriage and family therapist services under Medicare Part B. Improving access to mental health services is especially important as mental and behavioral health issues are becoming an increasing problem for older Americans—a problem that will only escalate further as the population ages.

Roughly one in five older adults in this country has one or more mental health or substance abuse conditions. Older adults who need mental health services are more likely than younger adults to receive inappropriate or inadequate treatment because primary care physicians—who provide most mental health care under Medicare—have insufficient training in the assessment and treatment of mental disorders associated with aging. Your legislation will improve older Americans’ access to licensed mental health professionals by expanding the list of covered providers who can deliver needed services for mental health and substance abuse services.

AARP appreciates your bipartisan leadership to help improve mental health services for seniors. We look forward to working with you on this and other issues important to older Americans. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, or have your staff contact Andrew Scholnick of our Government Affairs staff at 202-434-3770 or ascholnick@aarp.org.

Sincerely,

David Certner
Legislative Counsel and Legislative Policy Director
Government Affairs