

The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
1037 Longworth HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**RE: Please Co-Sponsor H.R. 1693: The Seniors Mental Health Access Improvement Act of 2009.**

Dear Congresswoman Pingree:

I am writing to strongly urge you to co-sponsor H.R. 1693, The Seniors Mental Health Access Improvement Act, which would establish Medicare coverage for licensed professional mental health counselors. Because of your awareness of the nation's need to improve health care services, particularly for elderly and rural populations, I believe that this legislation would be important to you. As your constituent, I want to thank you for your continuing efforts to advance health care services accessibility for all American citizens.

***Improve Access In Rural Areas and Among Underserved Minority Citizens:***

50% of rural counties have no practicing psychologists, psychiatrists, or social workers. Because the State of Maine has a large rural population, with 15% of its entire population age 65 or older, this legislation is of particular importance for our state. Two thirds of rural residents with mental illness symptoms receive no treatment at all. As a direct result of this lack of access, older Americans with chronic medical conditions *and* major depression (nearly 2 million senior citizens nationwide) have significantly higher rates of disability than those with either condition alone.

***Making Medicare A Better Purchaser of Mental Health Care:*** Inpatient psychiatric hospital utilization by elderly Medicare recipients is extraordinarily high. One third of these costly placements are caused by clinical depression and addiction disorders, making it strikingly clear that additional community-based mental health services provided by licensed professional mental health counselors will reduce unneeded hospitalizations.

The bottom line is: lack of access to mental health care is increasing the burden of disability on our senior citizens and rural communities. Coverage of Mental Health Counselors' services under Medicare represents a critical factor in alleviating this strain. Therefore, I would like to add my voice to many of the over 700 Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors in the State of Maine in asking you to please, take action today and Co-sponsor H.R. 1693.

Sincerely,