



September 30, 2025

Majority Leader John Thune
U.S. Capitol Building (Senate), 230
Washington, DC 20510

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer
U.S. Capitol Building (Senate), S-221
Washington, DC 20510

Speaker Mike Johnson
U.S. Capitol Building, H-232
Washington, DC 20515

Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries
Independence Ave. and S. Capitol St. SW
Rayburn House Office Building, 2267
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) Funding

On behalf of the National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc. and Affiliates (NBCC) and the over 70,000 National Certified Counselors we support nationwide, we write to express our strong support for the \$11,059,000 allocation for the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) included in the recently passed Senate and House Labor/HHS appropriations bills. This critical funding represents an essential investment in addressing the severe shortage of competent behavioral health professionals serving all populations across our nation.

The Critical Need for Community-Based Mental Health Professionals

America faces an unprecedented mental health crisis, with rural and high-need communities bearing a disproportionate burden of mental health challenges while having the least access to community-based care. The statistics are sobering: populations of need experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicide, yet they are significantly less likely to receive mental health services. When individuals do seek help, they may encounter providers who lack the understanding of the particular context necessary to deliver effective, responsive treatment. To engage with clients from rural communities, the behavioral health professional needs to understand both the specific resiliencies and the challenges that the community holds. The same is true for serving clients in military-connected communities and other communities with limited access to health care providers and services.

The MFP directly addresses this workforce development challenge by training behavioral health professionals, including mental health and addictions counselors, social workers, psychiatric nurses, psychologists, and marriage and family therapists to provide specialized care to all communities. Since its inception, the MFP has produced thousands of competent, highly trained behavioral health professionals who serve in the communities where they are needed most—often returning to practice in their home communities and providing care that focuses on the unique needs of the communities that require support.

NBCC's Role and Commitment

As the national certification organization for mental health counselors, NBCC has administered the MFP for counselors since 2012, leveraging our infrastructure and expertise and making significant financial investments in collaborative efforts with SAMHSA to expand mental health services throughout the nation. Through our affiliate the NBCC Foundation, [we have distributed millions of dollars in fellowship funding](#), community capacity grants, and educational programs that increase the public's mental health care confidence and access to care.

Our MFP Fellows represent the future of competent mental health care. They are master's- and doctoral-level students who commit to serving all populations upon graduation. They are dedicated to their clients' well-being and to the effort to reduce addictions and help clients lead their healthiest, most productive lives. Many of our Fellows are the first in their families to pursue advanced degrees, and they bring lived experiences that enable them to connect with and effectively serve all populations.

The Youth Mental Health Crisis

We particularly applaud the Committee's recognition of the importance of increasing the number of competent pediatric mental health professionals to address the nation's youth mental health crisis. Young people are experiencing high rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation and face unique challenges that require specialized understanding and intervention approaches. The NBCCF program ensures that all Fellows receive specific training in suicide-prevention, helping prepare these professionals to best meet the needs of youth and adults.

The MFP's emphasis on training providers who understand unique community needs is crucial for reaching young people who might otherwise go without care. Our Fellows often serve as bridges between communities and mental health service.

Economic and Social Return on Investment

The \$11,059,000 investment in the MFP generates significant returns far beyond its cost. Each MFP Fellow typically serves hundreds of clients throughout their career, well beyond the required 2-year commitment. This prevents costly emergency interventions, reduces hospitalization rates, and helps individuals maintain employment and family stability. When an individual has access to mental health care, they are better able to actively participate in their work, family, and community. Counselors support their clients' mental health and well-being and help them show up in productive ways for all of their roles in society. The investment in the MFP makes it possible for more counselors to do this important work and more communities to benefit from care. Moreover, MFP Fellows often become leaders in their communities, establishing new programs, training other providers, conducting research, and advocating for policy changes that improve mental health access. They fill faculty positions in universities, ensuring that the next generation of mental health professionals receives training in community-based care.

Ensuring Program Implementation Success

We strongly support the Committee's encouragement to SAMHSA to prioritize increasing the number of pediatric behavioral health treatment providers selected to participate in the MFP. We also encourage continued support for all mental health disciplines within the MFP structure, recognizing that addressing mental health disparities requires a comprehensive workforce approach.

A Moral and Strategic Imperative

Investing in the MFP is both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity. The nation's mental health workforce must reflect and understand the communities we serve. The MFP is one of the most effective mechanisms for ensuring that all Americans have access to competent mental health care.

The \$11,059,000 allocation represents a solid investment that will yield tremendous returns in improved mental health outcomes, reduced health disparities, and stronger communities. At a time when mental health needs are at unprecedented levels, we cannot afford to leave any community without adequate access to responsive care.

Call to Action

On behalf of NBCC and the mental health counseling profession, we urge you to support the full \$11,059,000 allocation for the Minority Fellowship Program in continuing resolutions and the final 2025–26 federal budget bill. This funding is essential for preparing the next generation of highly trained behavioral health professionals.

We stand ready to work with you and your staff to ensure the successful implementation of this vital program. Our decades of experience administering MFP grants and certifying mental health counselors provide us with unique insights into how federal investments in workforce development can be maximized for all communities.

Thank you for your leadership in addressing America's mental health needs and your commitment to ensuring that all communities have access to quality mental health care. The future of mental health equity depends on continued investments like the Minority Fellowship Program.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with you or your staff. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions.

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