

Mental Health Workforce Coalition

November 12, 2010

Marc Garufi, Chief
Public Health Branch
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Re: FY 2012 Budget for SAMHSA's Minority Fellowship Program

Dear Mr. Garufi:

The undersigned members of the Mental Health Workforce Coalition, a group dedicated to addressing the increasing shortage in mental health care professionals working with minority populations, write to urge you to **include increased funding in the President's Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request for the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP)**, administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Specifically, we request that you provide \$7.5 million for the MFP in FY 2012, an increase of \$3.2 million over the FY 2011 level in the President's Budget. This funding would allow the program to support additional fellows from minority backgrounds dedicated to working with underserved communities.

The mental health and substance abuse needs of minority communities in the U.S. have been historically underserved by trained practitioners, especially those with the skills necessary to provide culturally and linguistically competent services. The MFP was designed to help reverse the disparities that exist in mental health services and improve the quality of those services to minority populations. Through stipends to graduate level students, the program seeks to increase the number of culturally competent behavioral health professionals. These individuals teach, administer, conduct services research, and provide direct mental health and substance abuse services to underserved populations.

This highly successful program has been instrumental in the recruitment and training of more than 1,000 individuals from underrepresented groups in the mental health and substance abuse fields. The Program also facilitates fellowship programs for students willing to serve in underserved communities. The mental health needs of minorities in the U.S. have been, and remain, grossly underserved. Evidence suggests that minority mental health professionals practice in underserved areas at a higher rate than non-minorities, and that a direct positive relationship exists between the number of minority mental health professionals and the utilization of needed services by ethnic minorities.

As the U.S. population becomes increasingly diverse and the need for additional mental health care professionals increases, it is now more critical than ever to invest in programs like the MFP. The program will continue to help ensure that our health care workforce is sustainable, culturally competent and adequately trained to address the unique needs of individuals, families, and caregivers with mental health and substance-related problems.

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As you proceed with developing the FY 2012 Budget Request, we hope you will include an investment of \$7.5 million in FY 2012 for the MFP. We believe that a diverse health care workforce is essential to meeting the needs of our nation's underserved populations. Thank you for your consideration of our request and should you have any questions or require additional information about the MFP, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Wendy Naus at wendy@lewis-burke.com or (202) 289-7475.

Sincerely,

Andrew Austin-Dailey
American Psychological Association

Adisa Ajamu, PhD
American Association for Marriage and
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