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May 9, 2024

Dear Secretary Dr. Herrera Scott and Deputy Secretary Lord,

My name is Theodora Balis, MD and I am the current President of The Maryland Psychiatric Society – an organization which represents over 775 psychiatrists from across the state of Maryland. I am writing to you to express our concern over the withdrawal of state support for the continuation of vital research initiatives by the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center (MPRC) and the Spring Grove Hospital Center (SGHC). This important work has improved the lives of individuals with severe mental illness and has been internationally recognized.

Over the years, MPRC and SGHC have tirelessly dedicated themselves to enhancing the quality of care for individuals facing the challenges of severe mental illness. Through rigorous research efforts, they have made significant strides in advancing treatments, with a particular focus on underserved communities.

The importance of maintaining a supportive environment for safe and ethical research cannot be overstated. It is through these endeavors that psychiatry can offer promising treatment options to those who need them most, while upholding the highest standards of patient care and respect for individual rights. The MPRC and SGHC have been leaders in the psychiatric community in upholding these values.

The prospect of discontinuing essential research programs not only threatens the rights of patients but also undermines the efforts of dedicated healthcare professionals striving to provide the best possible care. The ramifications of such a decision extend far beyond the confines of these centers, impacting disadvantaged and disabled individuals across Maryland who rely on the benefits of esteemed and reliable research and clinical programs for access to innovative treatments and specialized care.

I wish to highlight two ongoing studies that exemplify the positive impact of MPRC's research endeavors: the ketogenic diet study aimed at improving symptoms of schizophrenia and the REVISIT-C study focusing on clozapine for the prevention of violence and aggression. These studies have been meticulously designed, adhering to the highest ethical standards and regulatory requirements, with the well-being of participants as the utmost priority. The outcomes of these studies guide clinical decisions in clinical settings around the world.

The suspension of these research activities not only raises ethical concerns but also deprives patients of valuable treatment options and the autonomy to make informed decisions about their care. It is imperative that we continue to advocate for the rights of patients to access innovative treatments and participate in research studies that have the potential to transform lives. Patients have the right to choose their course of treatment. The denial of the choice to participate in a research study denies them this choice.

Finally, we are always open and available to discuss decisions that concern our patients. As psychiatrists, we are the best trained professionals in the field of mental health and are eager to share our input regarding decisions that could harm or benefit our patients with state representatives. As leaders in this medical specialty representing psychiatrists who

MARYLAND PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY



treat patients in Maryland, we hope for transparency in decision-making and want to support our state legislators to make careful evidence-based decisions.

In closing, I urge you to consider the profound impact that the cessation of research activities would have on the individuals with mental illness whom we serve in this state and to support the continuation of these invaluable initiatives. Together, let us reaffirm our commitment to promoting the well-being of all patients and ensuring equitable access to the benefits of medical research.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please contact MPS Executive Director, Meagan Floyd, at 410-625-0232 or mfloyd@mdpsych.org with any questions. I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theodora Balis', written in a cursive style.

Theodora Balis, MD, President
Maryland Psychiatric Society, Inc.