Statement of Support:

*Better Mental Health Care, Lower-Cost Drugs, and Extenders Act*

Senate Finance Committee Open Executive Session

November 8, 2023

Advocates for Community Health (ACH), a member-driven organization of leading federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), commends the Senate Finance Committee for its leadership advancing in legislation that addresses our nation’s behavioral health crisis.

FQHCs are some of the most important access points for quality behavioral health care in the United States, serving historically marginalized communities and providing comprehensive, culturally competent, integrated care to over 31 million people. FQHCs serve all who need care, regardless of ability to pay or insurance status, and actively integrate behavioral health and primary care to improve health outcomes among low socioeconomic status (SES) and underserved communities. Community health centers and their staff have a proven record of treating the whole person and promoting sustainable health outcomes for patients.

ACH’s top priorities in behavioral health care include: 1) expanding the behavioral health care workforce, 2) increasing the flexibility of public payer reimbursement to accommodate integration of behavioral and physical health; and 3) supporting evidence-based care. We are pleased to see that the legislation the Senate Finance Committee is considering today is particularly strong in addressing workforce issues, including new incentives for providers in the Medicare space, and issuing new guidance to states to strengthen the Medicaid program in this area.

In addition, we applaud the *Better Mental Health Care, Lower-Cost Drugs, and Extenders Act* for directing CMS to support integration of primary and behavioral health care under Medicaid. We are hopeful that CMS will recognize that unnecessary limitations on health centers, like prohibiting billing for two services in the same day, prevent this kind of integration that ultimately benefits patients.

There is much more work to be done to ensure that patients receive the comprehensive behavioral health care they deserve, and ACH looks forward to continuing to work with Congress on these efforts.

For more information or to discuss these comments further, please contact Stephanie Krenrich, ACH’s Senior Vice President of Policy and Government Affairs, at skrenrich@advocatesforcommunityhealth.org.