

June 23, 2017

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law Statement
on the Better Care Reconciliation Act

The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law condemns the Better Care Reconciliation Act that was finally released to the public yesterday, following weeks spent drafting the bill in secret, closed door meetings. The bill drastically limits access to care for the people who need it most, yet was written and will be voted on without public hearings or input.

The Better Care Reconciliation Act retains most of the troubling provisions found in its House counterpart and includes even more damaging limits on Medicaid spending, putting millions of people with mental disabilities who rely on the program in danger by cutting funding even further than the \$834 billion proposed in the House bill. “These funding caps mean states are going to be forced to ration healthcare, compounded by punishing states who have invested the most in their citizens,” said Bethany Lilly, Deputy Director of Policy and Legal Advocacy. “The proposed carve out for a small subset of children with disabilities is blatant political ploy to distract from the unprecedented caps and cuts that will impact millions of children across the United States who not only rely on Medicaid for services to help them thrive but also rely on Medicaid to keep their parents, grandparents, and friends healthy.”

“It doesn’t matter how long a ‘phase out’ there is for the Medicaid Expansion—the bill still eliminates coverage for millions of Americans, including people with mental illnesses,” said Jennifer Mathis, Director of Policy and Legal Advocacy at the Bazelon Center. “Without federal funding, states won’t be able to finance coverage for those currently on the expansion. Phasing out the program over a longer period of time doesn’t change that. It would not avert a disaster; it would simply delay one.”

The bill also jeopardizes the strides made by the Affordable Care Act to expand access to mental health services in private insurance through Essential Health Benefits. “This bill is not just irresponsible; it’s dangerous,” said Mathis. “We urge Senators to reject it.”