

**Assignment 2: Mental Health Advocacy**

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OT-505-A: Becoming an OT Professional II

Professor Seanor & Professor McCloskey

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February 21, 2025

The Honorable Margaret Wood Hassan

United States Senate

Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Hassan,

I am an occupational therapy student at Sacred Heart University, residing in Connecticut, and I'm deeply passionate about advocating for equal access to mental health services. I'm writing to share my strong support for the reintroduction and passage of the *Occupational Therapy Mental Health Parity Act* (S.1592). This bill is important for improving access to vital occupational therapy services for individuals managing mental health and substance use disorders, especially through Medicare and Medicaid.

Occupational therapy plays a key role in mental health care by taking a holistic approach to treatment. OTs help clients work on emotional regulation, coping strategies, social participation, and daily living skills, which are all areas that can be impacted by mental health challenges. By supporting individuals in regaining their independence, OT not only improves their quality of life but also helps cut down on long-term costs linked to untreated mental health issues, like hospital readmissions and the need for more intensive services.

### **1. Closing Gaps in Medicare and Medicaid Coverage**

The OTMHA is essential for addressing existing gaps in Medicare and Medicaid that leave many individuals without access to vital services. By clearly stating that Medicare and Medicaid cover occupational therapy for mental health and substance use disorders, the bill removes the confusion and roadblocks that often prevent people from getting timely, appropriate care. This clarification ensures that OT is recognized as a core part of mental health treatment, giving individuals the opportunity to access comprehensive support without unnecessary restrictions.

## **2. Enhancing Awareness of OT Services**

A major strength of the OTMHA is its focus on education. The bill requires the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to inform healthcare providers, patients, and payers about existing OT coverage. This is a crucial step toward reducing the misinformation that often stops people from seeking or being referred to OT. When providers and patients better understand what services are available, the referral process becomes smoother, leading to more coordinated care and better health outcomes for individuals managing mental health and substance use challenges.

## **3. Expanding Mental Health Care in Underserved Communities**

The OTMHA also tackles the pressing issue of limited access to mental health services in underserved areas, especially in rural and low-income communities. By fully integrating occupational therapists into mental health care, the bill helps ease the strain on the already overburdened behavioral health workforce. OTs bring a unique skill set focused on functional performance, enabling them to fill gaps where traditional mental health resources are scarce.

This means more people, regardless of where they live, can access the support they need to improve their daily lives and overall well-being.

#### **4. Breaking Down Barriers to Holistic Mental Health Support**

Currently, many face unnecessary barriers to receiving OT services because of unclear coverage policies and restrictive reimbursement rules. The OTMHA would break down these obstacles, empowering OTs to provide the full range of care they're trained for. By integrating OT more deeply into mental health care, this bill promotes a more inclusive, holistic approach that focuses not just on treating symptoms, but on helping individuals thrive in their everyday activities.

As a future occupational therapist, I have seen firsthand how mental health challenges can impact an individual's ability to live independently and engage in meaningful daily activities. Expanding access to OT for mental health is not just a policy change but a necessary step toward ensuring equitable and comprehensive care for some of our most vulnerable populations.

I respectfully urge you to support the reintroduction and passage of the Occupational Therapy Mental Health Parity Act (S.1592). This legislation has the potential to improve the lives of individuals living with mental health conditions while strengthening our healthcare system's capacity to provide holistic care. Thank you for your time, consideration, and your commitment to improving mental health services for all.

Sincerely,

Marissa Lucia, OTS

Sacred Heart University