***Sample Letter to Your representatives***

[Date]

[address or email]

Dear Representative/Senator [Last Name];

I know firsthand of the tremendous challenges faced by individuals with mental illness and substance use disorders and their families in New Mexico.  We’ve known all too well that New Mexico's rates for both suicide and substance use have consistently been among the highest in the nation.

Yet, we have also seen the emergence of hope over the last three years as the state has implemented many innovative, measurable, and outcomes-based programs.  NMCAL's statewide crisis line, the peer operated Warmline, and the increased 24/7 accessibility to Core Service Agencies (CSA's) and other providers across the state are just a few of the examples of changes that are making a difference.   The funding changes currently being debated in Santa Fe have the potential to set back this progress, at the very time these positive results are becoming so apparent.

Mental Health America's 2016 ranking of states for behavioral health services has New Mexico's rank climbing by 10 positions in the past year, one of the most improved states in the Nation!   Now is the time to expand these efforts, not curtail them.  Investing in the health and wellbeing of New Mexicans is a long-term effort, yet we can see results that are already beginning to pay dividends. More people than ever before are accessing Behavioral Health treatment – an 86% increase in 2014. And the satisfaction rates of people receiving care in NM are higher than they’ve been for years (89%). These are just early indicators to take note of; the real benefits to the health and wellness of individuals and families in New Mexico are just beginning to emerge.

Massive cuts in New Mexico's investment in behavioral health services would seriously derail this progress, and individuals with disabilities, mental health, substance use, and people of all ages will be affected in very negative ways. Programs will close, jobs will be lost, and services to our most vulnerable citizens will be seriously reduced. In short, the recent gains seen in New Mexico’s behavioral health system will be all but lost.

Untreated behavioral health issues have always cost the state so much more than their solutions ever would have.  When the community does not address it's behavioral health needs, we pay this cost in the form of overcrowded jails, lost productivity of our workforce, and more expensive medical care year after year.   The human toll of these cuts will far outweigh any short-term savings the legislature may achieve.

I urge you to stay the course and insist on a long-term view of the health and wellbeing of New Mexicans. Do not reduce funding for the Behavioral Health Services Division. The literature and science is unequivocal; by expanding access and fixing gaps in the behavioral healthcare system, we will not only improve lives, but we will more than recoup those dollars in savings from our jails, law enforcement apprehensions, and emergency rooms.

Respectfully,

[Your Name]

Concerned New Mexican

[phone number or email]