

Mental Health Liaison Group

March 15, 2016

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate Health Education Labor &
Pensions (HELP) Committee
725 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Health Education Labor &
Pension (HELP) Committee
525 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Support for The Mental Health Reform Act of 2016

Dear Senator Alexander and Senator Murray:

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG)- a coalition of national organizations representing consumers/patients, family members, advocates, professionals and providers- is writing to express our support for the Mental Health Reform Act. It is our hope that this important bipartisan measure will be joined with key Senate Finance Committee Medicaid and Medicare behavioral health reforms during Senate floor consideration.

The Mental Health Reform Act makes balanced and judicious amendments to laws governing the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). By formalizing the partnership between SAMHSA and the HHS Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) while explicitly authorizing a strategic planning process, the HELP Committee measure strengthens SAMHSA's ability to coordinate policy across both HHS and other executive branch agencies. The Inter-departmental Serious Mental Illness Coordinating Committee could make a major contribution in this same area. It is MHLG's fervent hope that this body will be as effective as the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC) in galvanizing federal resources and multi-agency action.

The Mental Health Reform Act also provides authorizing legislation for a wide array of critically important initiatives including Grants for Jail Diversion, Primary Care Behavioral Health Integration (PBCHI) Grants (as one aspect of achieving full integrated medical-behavioral care in all settings), the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and the HRSA-SAMHSA Mental and Behavioral Health Training Program. Provisions of the HELP Committee package that would strengthen enforcement of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act are also vitally important to help improve health insurance plan compliance and increase patients' access to mental health care.

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National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Laurel Stine, J.D., American Psychological Association at lstine@apa.org
and Debbie Plotnick, MSS, MLSP, Mental Health America at dplotnick@mentalhealthamerica.net

Again, we appreciate the hard bipartisan work that went into producing the Mental Health Reform Act. We look forward to working with the HELP Committee closely as the legislative process unfolds.

Sincerely,

American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association on Health and Disability *
American Dance Therapy Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
CHADD- Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Clinical Social Work Guild
Corporation for Supportive Housing
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium
The Jewish Federations of North America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Counties *
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Behavioral Health
National League for Nursing
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
No Health without Mental Health
School Social Work Association of America
Treatment Communities of America

*MHLG Observer Group