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June 8, 2015

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The Honorable Tim Murphy, Ph.D  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2332 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2468 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Murphy and Johnson,

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the national medical specialty society representing more than 36,000 physicians specializing in psychiatry, I am writing to support H.R. 2646, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act of 2015. This is historic legislation that would, for the first time in decades, bring systemwide reforms and improvements to care for our patients and for those who currently lack access to needed treatment.

Every day throughout our country, individuals and their families are struggling with mental health crises, many of which could be prevented if our nation enacted comprehensive mental health reform. The statistics are startling: 14 million Americans suffer from serious mental illness, yet almost 40% of these individuals receive no treatment at all. The epidemic of preventable hospitalizations and incarceration costs our nation billions and displays widespread systemic failure. Moreover, despite recent progress, pervasive discrimination and stigma continues to harm our patients and impede efforts of the treatment community.

It is time for Congress to meet these challenges. Your bipartisan Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act will address these challenges by promoting evidence-based psychiatric care and research activities, ensuring better coordination of federal mental health resources, addressing the critical psychiatric workforce shortage, and improving enforcement of mental health parity, among other notable provisions. This bipartisan legislation is a much needed remedy for our nation's broken mental health system.

Among the many important policy proposals that H.R. 2646 advances, the bill would bring critical improvements and investments in our mental health system by:

- **Better coordinating and up-leveling fragmented mental health resources across federal departments and agencies through the establishment of an Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders within the Department of Health and Human Services who must be a highly qualified mental health clinician.** The duties and priorities of the proposed Assistant Secretary would emphasize promotion of science-driven and evidence-based approaches to care.
- **Addressing the critical psychiatric workforce shortage** by instituting a “Nationwide Strategy” to increase the psychiatric workforce and recruit medical professionals for the treatment of individuals with serious mental illness and substance use disorders. Moreover, H.R. 2646 would fix barriers to participation of child and adolescent psychiatrists in the National Health Service Corp and explicitly authorizes the Minority Fellowship Program.
- **Substantially improving enforcement of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act** by requiring annual reports to Congress on parity compliance investigations from federal departments, tasking the proposed Assistant Secretary with coordinating all programs and activities related to parity in health insurance benefits, and requiring the Government Accountability Office to investigate compliance of the parity law.
- **Increasing funding for the National Institute of Mental Health** in support of important research on brain disorders, innovative treatments and technologies, and the determinants of self and other-directed violence.
- **Supporting funding for innovative models of care that have the power to reduce long-term disability for individuals with severe mental illness** including the Recovery After an Initial Schizophrenia Episode (RAISE) program, which helps individuals with schizophrenia to lead productive, independent lives while aiming to reduce financial impacts on public systems.

Thank you for your leadership and dedication to improving the lives of millions of Americans who suffer from mental illness and substance use disorders. Without these improvements and investments, individuals and families in crisis will continue to face significant obstacles to treatment and communities will continue to bear preventable costs. We look forward to working with you and the Congress to pass this legislation this year.

Sincerely,



Renée Binder, M.D.  
President



Saul Levin, M.D., M.P.A.  
CEO and Medical Director