



National Alliance on Mental Illness

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The Honorable Tim Murphy  
U.S. Representative  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson  
U.S. Representative and Member of Congressional Black Caucus  
2468 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

July 15, 2015

Dear Representatives Murphy and Johnson:

On behalf of our members in Harlem and the Bronx, we join with the National Alliance on Mental Illness and Alliance for the Mentally Ill of New York State in support of HR-2646, *The Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act*. As a result of the broken mental health system, seriously mentally ill people of color who make up the majority of our membership are disproportionately homeless and represented in the criminal justice system. HR-2646 includes many provisions that will help our loved ones get access to evidence based mental illness care.

**Increases Minority Mental Health Workforce**

We are appreciative of the fact that HR 2646 authorizes fellowships to increase the number of culturally competent behavioral health professionals. There are a dearth of these throughout the country and in our own community. Care that is culturally competent is a key goal of our members.

**Improves Research on Why Mentally Ill are Incarcerated Rather than Treated**

In addition to funding mental health courts, your bill provides for the collection of information about why persons with mental illness are incarcerated. This research and analysis could be particularly valuable in generating better jail diversion practices.

**Supports Assisted Outpatient Treatment for a Very Small Group of the Most Seriously Mentally Ill**

AOT dramatically reduces homelessness, arrest, hospitalization and incarceration of the seriously ill. A 2009 study found it is one of the few community programs that does not discriminate based on race.<sup>1</sup> Our members in the New York version of AOT (Kendra's Law) receive case management, housing, medication maintenance and other important services they would otherwise not be able to avail themselves of.

**Reforms HIPAA, so Parents are not Shut out of Care of Mentally Ill Loved Ones if Needed to Protect "health, safety and welfare."**

Ameliorating the HIPAA Handcuffs that prevent parents from getting information about mentally ill loved ones is important to all families of the seriously ill who want to help. Your bill also clarifies doctors may receive information from families.

**Increases Availability of Psychiatric Beds**

If more psychiatric beds were available, police would be more likely to take someone they encounter to a hospital where they belong, rather than a jail where they don't. Your bill takes a small step to increase the number of beds by potentially slightly mitigating the impact of the IMD Exclusion, and eliminating the 180 day cap on Medicare reimbursement for hospital care.

**Focuses Protection and Advocacy Programs on Preventing Abuse and Neglect**

HR 2646 would focus the Protection and Advocacy program on what should be its most important mission: protecting people with mental illness from abuse and neglect, a problem that disproportionately affects people of color. Because of mission-creep, P&A has focused too much efforts on tangential issues, some of which are actually harmful to getting better care for people with serious mental illness.

Sincerely,

Claudia Powell  
President  
Cc: The Honorable Charles Rangel  
The Honorable G.K. Butterfield

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Swanson, Marvin Swartz, Richard A. Van Dorn, John Monahan, Thomas G. McGuire, Henry J. Steadman, and Pamela Clark Robbins "Racial Disparities In Involuntary Outpatient Commitment: Are They Real?" *Health Affairs*. Vol. 28. No. 3. May, 2009