

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

PRESS RELEASE

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Markup of HR2646, “Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act”

On Wednesday, November 4, the House Health Subcommittee of the Energy and Commerce Committee marked up the Rep. Tim Murphy (PA) and Rep. Bernice Johnson (TX) “**Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act**”. The Subcommittee did not pass the Bill as originally introduced, approving instead a substitute amendment.

NACBHDD had very serious problems with the original Bill because it would gravely impair the functioning of SAMHSA, advance assisted outpatient treatment without exploring better alternatives, and remove many legal protections for person with disabilities by changes to the Protection and Advocacy Program.

In the markup, most votes were purely along party lines, and little effort was made by the Chair, Rep. Joe Pitts (PA), to develop a consensus. The substitute amendment not only preserves the original problems noted above, but also adds other problems, including removal of:

- The proposed expansion of the “Excellence in Mental Health Act” set to pilot certified community behavioral health clinics (CCBHCs) beginning in 2017.
- Support for behavioral health providers in federal health IT incentive funding programs
- Repeal of the 190-day Medicare lifetime limit on psychiatric hospitalization.

The amended legislation also would allow states to shift funds between the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant and the Mental Health Block Grant. This is of great concern at a time when the Nation is suffering from a very serious epidemic of drug overdosing due to prescription opioids and heroin.

This draft legislation now may be considered by the full House Energy and Commerce Committee, where it could be further amended. Thus far, no action has been scheduled at the full Committee level.

“We want to appeal to Chairman Fred Upton (MI) of the Energy and Commerce Committee to fulfill his promise of seeking a bipartisan bill that spans the interests of the entire behavioral health community, including peers and other service users”, said Ron Manderscheid, NACBHDD Executive Director. “We all want to improve the quality of mental health and substance use care for all Americans”.

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