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March 16, 2016

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The Honorable Lamar Alexander
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and Pensions
United States Senate
430 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
United States Senate
430 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Senator Murray:

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the national medical specialty society representing more than 36,000 physicians specializing in psychiatry, we write to express our appreciation for your work in developing the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016, and for your timely consideration of this legislation within the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

Sixty million Americans live with a diagnosable psychiatric or substance use disorder, and thirteen million Americans live with a serious or severe psychiatric disorder. Many of these individuals are unable to access or receive the appropriate clinical treatment for these illnesses, and remain constantly challenged by mental health service delivery systems that are largely fragmented and uncoordinated across the country.

We are supportive of your efforts to refine and focus the mission of relevant federal agencies, which includes a greater emphasis on the needs of individuals with a serious mental illness and the treatments they require. We note specific provisions that authorize in statute a Chief Medical Officer in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, address critical mental health workforce shortages, and establish an Inter-Departmental Serious Mental Illness Coordinating Committee. We are also supportive of several initiatives that have been authorized or reauthorized in the legislation; it is vitally important that these initiatives receive adequate levels of funding in order to be as effective as possible.

The tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, ignited an historic Congressional review of the state of our nation’s mental health system, and paved the way for the introduction of bipartisan measures in both chambers with broad stakeholder support and the potential for markedly improving care for Americans with serious mental illness. As the Committee prepares to advance the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016, APA stands ready to work with you to ensure that comprehensive mental health reform legislation can be sent to the President’s desk for signature this year.

Sincerely,

Renée Binder, M.D.
President

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