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June 17, 2016

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The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-107, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
1705 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan, Minority Leader Pelosi, Majority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Whip Hoyer:

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the national medical specialty society representing 36,500 physicians specializing in psychiatry, we write to urge you to bring H.R. 2646, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act, **to the House floor for a vote** before the scheduled recess in August. As you know, this legislation, which was unanimously reported out favorably by the Energy and Commerce Committee on June 15, has the support of 197 Members of Congress, as well as numerous mental health stakeholders and patient advocacy organizations, including the APA.

Mental illness is widely prevalent in the United States. Over 68 million Americans have experienced a psychiatric or substance use disorder in the past year. That is more than 20% of the total population of the United States. Lifetime rates are much higher with some estimates approaching 50%. More striking, in 2013, the last year for which data are available, more than 41,000 Americans died by suicide, 20% more than by motor vehicle accidents. Many individuals with mental illness or substance use disorders are unable to access or receive appropriate clinical treatment, and they remain constantly challenged by mental health service delivery systems that are largely fragmented and uncoordinated across the country.

We strongly support efforts that meaningfully refine and enhance federal support of mental health services, particularly those services designed to meet the medical needs of individuals with serious mental illness. We note and commend specific provisions in H.R. 2646 that establish an Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders, address critical mental health workforce shortages, ensure better enforcement of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, promote evidence-based clinical care, seek to clarify federal protections of health information, and form an Inter-Departmental Serious Mental Illness Coordinating Committee. Furthermore, we support several initiatives in this legislation that have been authorized or reauthorized; it is vitally important that these initiatives receive adequate levels of support in order to be as effective as possible.

We sincerely appreciate the tireless efforts of Representative Tim Murphy and Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson in raising awareness of the unmet needs of individuals with serious mental illness, and we applaud the support you've already indicated for considering mental health reform legislation. The 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,

Maria A. Oquendo, M.D.
President

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