



A Passionate Voice for Compassionate Care

May 27, 2016

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA), the national leadership organization of more than 2,200 Catholic health care systems, hospitals, long-term care facilities, sponsors, and related organizations, **I am writing to express our support for the Mental Health Reform Act (S. 2680) and to ask you to support both the bill and efforts to bring this important legislation up for a vote before the full Senate as soon as possible.**

As health care providers many of our members play a pivotal role in the delivery of mental and behavioral health services, and we have seen first-hand how harmful the gaps in the mental health system in our nation are to those we serve. Our Catholic health ministry is also primarily concerned with reaching out to the poor and most vulnerable, many of whom are in desperate need of readily accessible and high-quality mental and behavioral health services. Our advocacy agenda calls on Congress to support legislation to expand programs and funding for these services, especially those that are community-based, to ensure access to coordinated, holistic care. We believe S. 2680 takes significant steps towards that goal.

We commend the legislation's provisions to strengthen mental health parity; establish new grant programs for research and early intervention; modernize existing programs to develop and incorporate the most up-to-date approaches to treat mental health conditions; and provide incentives to states to help integrate mental and physical health services.

We also are encouraged by the recent support expressed by members of the Senate Finance Committee for critical reforms in mental health services to ensure parity within the Medicaid and Medicare programs. Allowing for same-day and same-location mental health and primary care services and repealing the current Medicaid exclusion on inpatient psychiatric care for certain individuals would strengthen this legislation further, and we hope these provisions will be included in the final bill.



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The Catholic health ministry applauds the efforts of Senate HELP Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander and Ranking Member Patty Murray, along with the original sponsors Senators Bill Cassidy and Chris Murphy, to highlight the increasingly urgent issue of mental health reform by reporting S. 2680 out of the committee and providing the full Senate with an opportunity to address this vital health need. We hope you will join us in asking Senate leadership to schedule a vote now on the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Sr. Carol Keehan'.

Sr. Carol Keehan, DC
President and CEO