

March 26, 2015

The Honorable Tim Murphy  
2332 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Murphy:

On behalf of the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) and our over 40,000 members, I am writing to applaud your efforts to improve our nation's mental health system and express ENA's support for your legislation, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act.

As emergency nurses, we see first-hand the effects that a broken mental health system is having in the treatment provided to patients with severe mental illnesses. Every day, people with behavioral health issues are looking for help with nowhere to turn except their local hospital's emergency departments (EDs). These patients not only utilize more resources than other patients, but they are forced to wait, sometimes for days, until a bed in an inpatient facility becomes available. In fact, ENA has conducted research that found that the average stay in an ED for behavioral health patients is 18 hours versus 4 hours for other types of patients.

Your legislation will address these boarding issues by increasing the availability of inpatient psychiatric beds. In addition, the bill will expand the mental health workforce, integrate and connect physical and mental health care providers, improve reimbursement for psychiatric treatments under the Medicare and Medicaid programs, and provide resources to communities for suicide prevention by reauthorizing the Garret Lee Smith Suicide Prevention Act.

The time has come that we approach our mental health system as a national medical emergency demanding the attention of lawmakers in Congress. Systemic changes are needed in the way individuals with mental illness are cared for in this country. The Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act will help ensure resources are made available to conduct vitally needed research on this issue and to fund additional inpatient and outpatient treatment beds with appropriate professional staffing. Most importantly, your bill will help many individuals before they reach a crisis point and require emergency care.

Again, thank you for introducing this important legislation for the millions of patients suffering from mental illnesses. We look forward to working with you and your staff on this critical health care issue.

Sincerely,



Matthew F. Powers, MS, BSN, RN, MICP, CEN  
2015 ENA President