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April 9, 2014

The Honorable Tim Murphy
Chairman Oversight & Investigations
Subcommittee Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Murphy,

The LEAP Institute has trained hundreds of thousands of healthcare professionals, family caregivers, consumers and first responders worldwide to build partnerships for treatment and recovery. A longstanding focus of our work here at home has been bridging the gaps created by a broken mental health system.

The Surgeon General's report under President Clinton, and President Bush's Commission on Mental Health in America have agreed for decades: our mental healthcare system is fragmented and needs serious attention in order to save lives that are needlessly destroyed or lost to untreated mental illness. These bipartisan studies argue that we can accomplish this while saving money. But not until now has comprehensive legislation designed to do exactly that, been proposed. That is why the LEAP Institute strongly and enthusiastically supports H.R. 3717, the Helping Families In Mental Health Crisis Act.

More than 11 million Americans have serious mental illness—impacting the individual, their family and community resources-- and because of the Federal government's chaotic patchwork of antiquated programs and ineffective policies patients end up in the criminal justice system, dying from untreated mental illness, or on the streets because effective services are not available. The amount of needless misery and tragedy is matched only by the wasted dollars spent on the end-game: the law-enforcement and social agencies, local government and others who are left to pick up the pieces when untreated mental illness strikes again.

Simply put, we are talking about tragedy, misery, lives and money that could have been saved had a comprehensive Federal plan, like that proposed by Congressman Tim Murphy, been in place to address the ongoing problems identified by bipartisan studies.

We believe the Helping Families In Mental Health Crisis Act goes a long way toward fixing the nation's broken mental healthcare system by focusing programs and resources on empowering parents and caregivers, fixing the tragic shortage of inpatient beds for the most critical patients, providing evidence based alternatives to institutionalization, supporting 'Assisted Outpatient Treatment' — reducing rates of imprisonment, homelessness, substance abuse, and costly ER visits for the chronically mentally ill. The bill reaches underserved and rural Americans, and will increase continuity of care so patients started in treatment stay in treatment.

The bill looks to the future by driving ongoing evidence-based care through the creation of an Assistant Secretary for Mental Health (HHS) to coordinate federal government programs and oversee evidence-based models of care. With no oversight the system has fallen apart. A lack of accountability has led to our government taking its eye off the ball. In the same vein, reinvesting in what we know works, the bill reauthorizes mental health courts so patients are treated in the healthcare system and not warehoused in the criminal justice system.

Clearly, from our perspective, Congressman Murphy and his staff have done their homework and have utilized extensive external expertise in the drafting of this seminal legislation. The Helping Families In Mental Health Crisis Act will be remembered for decades to come as a turning point in America's treatment of its most vulnerable citizens. It is a common-sense solution to America's broken mental healthcare system.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Xavier F. Amador', written in a cursive style.

Xavier F. Amador, Ph.D.