

July 1, 2015

To: Members of Congress

Mental Illness Policy Org. is a non-partisan, research-based think-tank on serious mental illness. We are financially supported by mothers of individuals with serious mental illness who often beg for but cannot get treatment for their seriously mentally ill loved ones. Many become tragedies. Some become headlines.

We strongly urge you to support HR 2646, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act introduced by Rep. Tim Murphy and Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson. This bill would start to fix the following real problems mothers of persons with serious mental illness face everyday:

1. Because of HIPAA, moms can't get information on what hospital their loved ones are in, when they will be released, what medications they need, when appointments are or any of the information they need to provide care and prevent a tragedy. HR2646 would allow this information to be shared if needed to "protect health safety and welfare."
2. Because of Medicaid restrictions ("IMD Exclusion"¹), our loved ones with mental illness can't get hospitalized when they need it. As a result, they are forced into shelters, jails, prisons and morgues. There are three times as many Americans incarcerated for mental illness as hospitalized.² HR2646 will start to end federal policies that prevent the mentally ill who need hospitalization from receiving it.
3. Current laws prevent our seriously ill relatives from being treated until *after* they become 'danger to self or others'.³ Rather than prevent violence, laws require it. HR2646 will provide states funds for Assisted Outpatient Treatment. It allows courts to require a small group of people with serious mental illness and a prior history of arrest, violence or needless hospitalization to stay in treatment as a condition of living in the community. AOT is proven to dramatically reduce homelessness, hospitalization, arrest, incarceration, violence, and suicide in persons with the most serious mental illnesses who are not helped by voluntary treatment.⁴ By reducing hospitalization and incarceration it cuts taxpayer costs in half. It is less restrictive, and more humane than the alternatives our relatives face: inpatient commitment or incarceration.
4. In spite of spending \$203 billion⁵ on mental *health* (2014), our seriously mentally *ill* relatives can't get care because most of what is offered is not geared to the seriously ill, is not evidence-based, or does not improve meaningful outcomes like reducing homelessness, arrest, incarceration, hospitalization, suicide and violence. The seriously ill are a very small part (4-8% of total population⁶), and need different services than the higher functioning.⁷ HR 2646 requires government funds to be limited to programs that are evidence-based and encourages them to improve meaningful outcomes in people with serious mental illness. HR 2646 also gets government out of the business of funding anti-psychiatry and groups that impeded care.

Every day mothers of persons with mental illness are forced to fight the system to get care for their seriously mentally ill relatives many of whom have schizophrenia. HR 2646 will help moms, persons with serious mental illness, law enforcement, the public, taxpayers and government. Please support.

DJ Jaffe, Executive Director

¹ IMD Overview: <http://mentalillnesspolicy.org/media/bestmedia/imd-exclusion-washington-post.html>. IMD Details: <http://mentalillnesspolicy.org/imd/imd-legal-analysis.html>

² Three times as many mentally ill incarcerated: <http://mentalillnesspolicy.org/NGRI/jails-vs-hospitals.html>

³ Uncivil Liberties: <http://mentalillnesspolicy.org/media/bestmedia/uncivil liberties.html>

⁴ AOT Research: <http://kendras-law.org/kendras-law/research/kendras-law-studies.html>

⁵ SAMHSA US Mental Health Expenditures: <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA08-4326/SMA08-4326.pdf>

⁶ NIMH statistics on serious mental illness: http://www.nimh.nih.gov/statistics/SMI_AASR.shtml

⁷ Focus on mental health kills mentally ill: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dj-jaffe/mental-health-kills-the-m_b_426672.html