



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

March 31, 2016

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Health, Education Labor and
Pensions Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Christopher Murphy
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Support letter for Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 (S. 2680)

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Senators Cassidy and Murphy:

The undersigned members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Rights Task Force write to express our support for the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 (S.2680) as reported out of committee on March 16, 2016. CCD is a coalition of national disability-related organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures full equality, self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society.

We all agree that the public mental health system is in need of reform and the services that individuals with psychiatric disabilities need are far too often unavailable. We believe that S.2680 as reported out of committee would bring important improvements in the lives of people with psychiatric disabilities.

We appreciate that this bill would make changes to the mental health system for children and adults that would result in the expansion of needed community mental health services. It recognizes the importance of reducing hospitalization and incarceration, and expanding access to employment and housing services, as well as mental health services provided to students in school. Importantly, it does not dismantle the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) or eliminate critical privacy rights under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) or Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Finally, we appreciate that the bill also recognizes the crucial importance of the Protection and Advocacy (P&A)'s Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) program in protecting the rights of people with psychiatric disabilities.

Thank you all for your bipartisan work on these important mental health issues. We look forward to working with you to enact this legislation as reported out of committee. Please contact Dara Baldwin at dara.baldwin@ndrn.org or Jennifer Mathis at jenniferm@bazelon.org with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)
American Federation for the Blind (AFB)
Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)
The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)
Lutheran Services in America Disability Network
National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC)

cc: Senate HELP Committee Members
The entire US Senate