

Urgent

Action Required

For Your Information

Date: March 17, 2016

To: SPTA and Division Federal Advocacy Coordinators, and APAGS Coordinators

From: Doug Walter, J.D., Associate Executive Director for Government Relations,  
American Psychological Association Practice Organization

Cc: Katherine Nordal, Ph.D., Executive Director for Professional Practice  
SPTA Directors of Professional Affairs  
SPTA Executive Directors  
CAPP  
APAPO Board of Directors

Re: Comprehensive Mental Health Legislation Passes Senate Committee

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## **Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 Moves Forward in U.S. Senate**

Yesterday, the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions voted in favor of S. 2680, the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016. Introduced by Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Patty Murray (D-WA), Bill Cassidy (R-LA), and Chris Murphy (D-CT), this bipartisan legislation provides vital reforms to federal mental health funding to increase patients' access to effective and evidence-based care particularly to those with serious mental illness (SMI).

Supported by the APA and the APA Practice Organization, notable provisions of this legislation include:

- Helping SAMHSA meet its mission by establishing a new Inter-Departmental Serious Mental Illness Coordinating Committee, and by promoting research and subsequent implementation of evidence-based practices to improve the prevention, diagnosis, treatment of and recovery from mental illness and substance use disorders.
- Authorizing major mental health and substance abuse grant programs for individuals with SMI or serious emotional disturbance, and significantly improving the incentive grant program promoting integration of primary and behavioral health care.
- Reauthorizing the Garrett Lee Smith youth suicide prevention grant program, and authorizing the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline program.
- Clarifying appropriate use and disclosure of protected health information under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), and providing resources and training on requirements for communication between providers, patients, and families.

S. 2680 is now the leading mental health reform bill in the Senate and builds upon consensus provisions included in S. 1945, the Mental Health Reform Act of 2015, introduced by Senators Cassidy and Murphy, and S. 1893, the Mental Health Awareness and Improvement Act of 2015,

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sponsored by Senators Alexander and Murray. The APA and the Practice Organization are hopeful that the Senate will schedule a full vote on S. 2680 this year.

There are several provisions the APA and the Practice Organization advocated for that were not included in the bill passed out of Committee, in part, because some of these provisions are outside the Committee's jurisdiction. We continue to press for inclusion of these provisions, among others, when S. 2680 is considered by the full Senate:

- Allowing limited Medicaid coverage for services provided in institutions for mental disease (IMD).
- Removing of the 190-day lifetime limit on Medicare coverage for services provided in inpatient psychiatric hospitals.
- Increasing the number of mental health service providers by authorizing the Minority Fellowship Program, and reauthorizing the Graduate Psychology Education program.

Additionally, the Practice Organization, along with Rhode Island psychologists, have worked closely with Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) to include a SAMHSA pilot program for the adoption and use of certified electronic health records to improve the coordination and further integration of behavioral and physical health. During the Committee hearing, Senator Whitehouse offered an amendment to include his pilot program, withdrew it, and has since introduced the provision as a separate bill. He plans to offer the pilot program again when S. 2680 is considered by the full Senate.

A comprehensive mental health reform bill is also making its way through the U.S. House of Representatives. As previously reported, H.R. 2646, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act of 2015 was introduced last June by Rep. Tim Murphy (R-PA), a psychologist, and Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), a psychiatric nurse. H.R. 2646 passed favorably out of the House Energy & Commerce Subcommittee on Health, and it is expected that the full Committee will consider the legislation this spring.

The House and Senate still must pass their versions of comprehensive mental health reform legislation, the two legislative chambers must then negotiate a compromise package to vote on before sending it to President Obama to sign, so there is much work ahead toward enactment.

On March 1st, during the Practice Organization's State Leadership Conference, over 400 psychology leaders went to Capitol Hill to urge Congress to pass consensus, bipartisan, comprehensive mental health reform legislation. The Practice Organization will continue to work with the sponsors as these bills move through the legislative process to ensure that their provisions continue to benefit practicing psychologists and their patients.

**For more information, contact APAPO Government Relations Office at [Pracgovt@apa.org](mailto:Pracgovt@apa.org) or (202) 336-5889. Visit APAPO on-line at [APAPracticeCentral.org/Advocacy](http://APAPracticeCentral.org/Advocacy).**