

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (December 12, 2013)—*Statement of David Shern, Ph.D., president and CEO, Mental Health America:*

Rep. Tim Murphy (R-Pa.) today introduced the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act of 2013. Despite our work with Rep. Murphy on many of our behavioral health priorities, Mental Health America cannot ignore the troubling provisions included in this bill and must reject any effort that would undermine the role of consumers in their recovery and limit the availability of mental health and addiction support services by persons who have experienced mental health and substance use conditions.

Mental Health America opposes the elimination of programs at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for and by consumers. These are critical supports to ensure that consumers are the catalysts for transforming the mental health and related systems in their state and for making recovery and resiliency the expectation and not the exception.

We are also concerned with the changes in privacy laws that may lead to the erosion of privacy protections—disrupting the patient-provider relationship on a set of health conditions which are still stigmatized and only recently emerging from the shadows.

Mental Health America also rejects the expanded use of involuntary treatment—ignoring the rights of persons with mental health conditions to make decisions concerning their treatment or minimizing the dignity, autonomy and self-determination of persons affected by mental health conditions. We believe that involuntary treatment should only occur as a last resort and should be limited to instances where persons pose a serious risk of physical harm to themselves or others.

Lastly, it is disconcerting that the bill takes steps to unravel the lead public health agency dedicated to mental health and addiction issues through a number of provisions that eliminate key programs, including critical prevention and early intervention supports and services; undermine protection and advocacy for consumers; transfer authority away from SAMHSA; and dismantle key activities within the Department of Health and Human Services.

At the same time, Mental Health America commends Rep. Murphy for including provisions that would reauthorize the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act (suicide prevention; S. 116/H.R. 2734), Mental Health First Aid (S. 153/H.R. 274), Children's Recovery from Trauma Act (S. 380), Excellence in Mental Health Act (S. 264/H.R. 1263), Mental Health First Aid Act (S. 153/H.R. 274), Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Act of 2013 (MIOTCRA; S. 162/H.R. 401) and the Behavioral Health IT Act (S. 1517, S.1685/H.R. 2957).

Mental Health America and our affiliates stand ready to work with Rep. Murphy and other Congressional leaders to advance our shared legislative agenda to help individuals with mental health and addiction issues.

Mental Health America (www.mentalhealthamerica.net), founded in 1909, is the nation's leading community-based network dedicated to helping all Americans achieve wellness by living mentally healthier lives. With our 240 affiliates across the country, we touch the lives of millions—Advocating for changes in mental health and wellness policy; Educating the public & providing critical information; and Delivering urgently needed mental health and wellness Programs and Services.