



Cassidy, Murphy Lead Bipartisan Group of Senators in Requesting Funds to Fully Implement Their Mental Health Reform Act

WASHINGTON— U.S. Senators Bill Cassidy, M.D. (R-LA), and Chris Murphy (D-CT), co-authors of [the Mental Health Reform Act signed into law in 2016](#), are leading a bipartisan group of senators in calling for robust funding to fully implement the law and help make America's mental health system more responsive to the needs of those with mental illness. The senators emphasized the continued importance of funding to increase access to care, highlighting the fact that while many Americans live with mental illness, many struggle to access care or treatment.

“In December 2016, Congress made mental health and substance use disorders an important, bipartisan issue by passing this significant legislation into law,” **states the senators’ letter** to Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Chairman Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA). “We must follow through by funding these programs to truly address the long-standing challenges in our mental health system and enact the change that was outlined in the Mental Health Reform Act.”

Among other things, [Cassidy and Murphy’s bipartisan Mental Health Reform Act](#) strengthened enforcement of mental health parity laws, promoted integrated mental health and physical health, and established new programs to assist those with, or at risk for, mental illness.

In addition to Cassidy and Murphy, senators signing the letter include Cory Booker (D-NJ), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Chris Coons (D-DE), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Doug Jones (D-AL), Angus King (I-ME), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Ed Markey (D-MA), Mike Rounds (R-SD), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), and Dan Sullivan (R-AK) joined Murphy and Cassidy in signing the letter.

Earlier this week, Murphy and Cassidy joined a bipartisan group of colleagues in [urging federal agencies to enforce federal mental health parity laws](#), including parity provisions signed into law as part of the Mental Health Reform Act to improve behavioral health coverage.

The [full text of the senators' letter](#) is below.

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

We write to respectfully request robust funding for the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Reform Act of 2016. In December 2016, Congress made mental health and substance use disorders an important, bipartisan issue by passing this significant legislation into law as part of the 21st Century Cures Act. Through your leadership, Congress built on that success by increasing funding for many mental health and substance use disorder programs within the recent Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018. Continuing funding for those programs and the others that were authorized will fulfill the vision laid out in the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Reform Act of 2016.

Approximately 44 million Americans experience a mental illness in a given year, and serious mental illness costs over \$193 billion in lost productivity each year. Mental illness impacts every facet of our society. Twenty percent of American teens aged 13 to 18 years live with a mental health condition, and students with mental health conditions have the highest dropout rate of any disability group. Seventy percent of youth in state and local juvenile justice systems have a mental illness. Furthermore, the overall national suicide rate increased by twenty-four percent from 1999 to 2014.

While so many Americans are living with mental illness and substance use disorders, they are struggling to find access to mental health care. There is a shortage of mental health providers across the nation. According to the Health Resources & Services Administration, 123 million Americans were living in areas with shortages of mental health providers in 2017. That number is an increase from around 91 million Americans living in mental health provider shortage areas just five years ago.

The primary goal of the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Reform Act of 2016 was to improve our mental health system and make it more responsive to the needs of those with mental illness. Specifically, the law expanded efforts to integrate physical and mental health, strengthened enforcement and transparency of mental health parity and promoted early intervention and telehealth psychiatry access for children. It also increased the mental health workforce and required the administration to disseminate model training programs and materials for consumers, family members and providers on when it is appropriate to share protected health information. Lastly, the bill updated a number of existing programs at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, such as the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant and grants on jail diversion, homelessness and suicide prevention. We must follow through by funding these programs to truly address the long-standing challenges in our mental health system and enact the change that was outlined in the Mental Health Reform Act.

Given the vast need for mental health resources and access to care for Americans of all ages, we strongly urge you to provide the resources necessary to implement the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Reform Act of 2016.

Sincerely,

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