

## Senator Chris Murphy Advocates for Mental Health

For far too long, Americans trying to get help for mental health and addiction issues have faced the daunting challenge of dealing with a mostly broken and underfunded system. According to the American Psychiatric Association, over 68 million Americans have experienced a psychiatric or substance use disorder in the past year. We know how much pain and loss of productivity these issues cause, and how widespread they are, yet the effects of a largely dysfunctional system continue to ripple outward.

The litany of problems is well known to those of us working in the field, among them: fragmented care, particularly between physical and mental health providers; bare-bones to no insurance coverage, often with very high deductibles; lack of support and implementation for innovative, evidence-based, models of care; diminished or eliminated funding sources and grants; minimal emphasis on preventive/early intervention programs, specifically suicide awareness, opioid abuse, pediatric screening; and absence of funding for education and training of mental health professionals, as well as others such as teachers, lawyers, first responders, and emergency personnel.

Enter Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy (D) who has dedicated himself to reforming our mental health and substance abuse system. Along with co-author, Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA), the Mental Health Reform Act was created to “expand federal resources and improve coordination for mental health and substance abuse treatment programs.”



Signed into law as part of the 21st Century CURES Act in December 2016, the Mental Health Reform Act drew 28 co-sponsors, 14 Republicans and 14 Democrats, resulting in a truly bipartisan collaboration.

“Mental illness and addiction do not discriminate, so our health care system shouldn’t either. It should be as easy to access a doctor or get prescriptions for an illness of the mind as it is for an illness of the body. It’s that simple principle that motivated all the work I put into this bill. I will keep working with Republicans and Democrats to make sure our bill is implemented as Congress intended, and to keep our bipartisan coalition engaged in mental health until we finish the job we started,” said Senator Murphy.

In the process of drafting the Mental Health Reform Act and moving it forward, Senator Murphy held more than 30 mental health and substance abuse roundtables, town halls and public hearings with providers, advocates and families in Connecticut.

“This is the most comprehensive reform of our nation’s mental health laws in a generation, and I’m so thrilled that we drafted it and passed it with support from both Democrats and Republicans. In Connecticut, I’ve met too many people struggling with mental illness who can’t find the care they need, or can’t get their insurance company to approve the care once they find it. This bill means millions of dollars in new treatment, and it creates a pathway to a better integrated, more coordinated system for people with serious mental illness,” said Murphy. “I’m incredibly grateful for Senator Cassidy’s partnership and friendship. He brought a doctor’s knowledge and a dogged determination to our effort, and a lot of people will be better off because of it.”

The Mental Health Reform Act, is a first step, but a sorely needed one. Rooted in public health principles, it authorizes \$1 billion over two years to tackle the opioid epidemic, addresses serious clinical workforce shortages, and improves the coordination of fragmented mental health resources. Additionally, the Mental Health Reform Act provides for parity of mental health and physical health services and includes enforcement provisions to hold insurance companies accountable should they fail to provide patients with equal access to mental health treatment services.

Per the statute, other provisions of the law will not take effect until later this year or next year, and some depend on action and guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Because of its bi-partisan support in Congress, Republicans and

Democrats alike want to see strong and effective execution. That said, with a new healthcare law being debated in Washington as well as huge cuts to domestic spending proposed in the first draft federal budget, the fate of the bill's implementation is newly threatened. Senator Murphy promises to remain diligent in overseeing implementation of the Act and continuing to fight for appropriate mental health care funding.

For a fact sheet, please visit:

<https://www.murphy.senate.gov/download/fact-sheet-mental-health-reform>