

NATIONAL
DISABILITY RIGHTS
NETWORK



Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Disabilities

March 15, 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

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

The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) writes today to express its support for the Mental Health Reform Act that will be considered in the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee on March 16, 2016. It is our hope that this important bipartisan measure will lead to critical and needed improvements in the mental health system.

NDRN is the national membership association for the Protection and Advocacy (P&A) and Client Assistance Program (CAP) agencies, the nationwide network of congressionally-mandated agencies that advocate on behalf of persons with disabilities in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, U.S. territories (American Samoa, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands), and there is a P&A / CAP affiliated with the Native American Consortium which includes the Hopi, Navaho, and San Juan Southern Piute Nations in the Four Corners region of the Southwest. NDRN and the P&A / CAP network promote a society where people with disabilities enjoy equality of opportunity and are able to participate fully in community life by exercising informed choice and self-determination. For over thirty years, the P&A / CAP network has worked to protect the human and civil rights of individuals with disabilities of any age and in any setting including individuals with psychiatric disabilities. Collectively, the P&A / CAP agencies are the largest provider of legally-based advocacy services for persons with disabilities in the United States.

In 1986, Congress passed the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) Act. The PAIMI Act authorized P&A agencies to provide advocacy services to individuals who have “a significant mental illness or emotional impairment...” Under the PAIMI program, P&As are authorized: (1) to protect and to advocate for the rights of people with mental illness and, (2) to investigate reports of abuse and neglect in facilities that either provide care or treat individuals with mental illness. In October 2000, the PAIMI Act was amended to authorize P&As to advocate for persons with mental illness living in community settings, including their own homes. As can be seen through the expansion of the PAIMI Act mandates, the United States’ mental health system has shifted from delivering services and supports only in large institutions to serving individuals in community-based settings. Research over the years has proven that community-based settings have been highly successful for people with mental illness, as well as being a better fiscal choice for providing services and treatment.

Every day, the mental health system in the United States works to assist individuals with psychiatric disabilities to receive services and supports necessary for them to be able to participate in their communities. Unfortunately, the P&As continue to document the many barriers that children and adults with psychiatric disabilities experience when trying to access services and supports from our nation's mental health system. NDRN supports the Mental Health Reform Act because it creates critical changes to the mental health system for children and adults through its numerous titles.

Thank you all for your bipartisanship on these important mental health issues. We look forward to working with you to enact this legislation. Should you have any questions about this legislation or the work of the P&A agencies in your state, please feel free to be in touch with Eric Buehlmann 202-408-9514 ext. 121 or eric.buehlmann@ndrn.org.

Sincerely,



Curt Decker
Executive Director

cc: Senate HELP Committee Members