

Rep. Joseph R. Pitts
Opening Statement
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Full Committee Markup:
H.R. 2646, the “Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act”
Tuesday, June 14, 2016 (5:00 pm)

Mr. Chairman, we have before us today legislation to help reform our Nation’s mental health care system. The legislation authored by our colleague, Rep. Tim Murphy, is designed to help families and their loved ones struggling with crises caused by mental health disorders. The bill makes available much needed psychiatric, psychological, and supportive services.

With more than 11 million Americans who suffer with severe mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression, many are going without treatment and often families struggle to find appropriate care for their loved ones.

Since there is a patchwork of different programs and sometimes ineffective policies across numerous agencies, it is important for Congress to examine ways to fix the broken mental health system by focusing and coordinating programs and resources on psychiatric care for patients and families most in need of services.

Over the past several years, Dr. Murphy, a practicing psychologist, has worked diligently on this legislation. As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Chairman Murphy launched a review of the country’s mental health system beginning in January 2013. The investigation, which included public forums, hearings with expert witnesses, document and budget reviews, and GAO studies revealed that the federal government’s approach to mental health is a chaotic patchwork of antiquated programs and ineffective policies spread across numerous agencies with little to no coordination. The Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act of 2016, H.R. 2646, aims to fix the nation’s

broken mental health system by refocusing programs, reforming the way the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration administers grants, and removing barriers to care.

One other important area I want to touch on today is the role of medication for those afflicted with mental health ailments. Medicare is one critical source of coverage for prescription drugs. Part D plans need to provide access to all (or substantially all) available drugs in the six classes that include antidepressants and antipsychotics. Getting these medications wrong can have serious negative consequences. In the past, Congress has rejected efforts to lessen this coverage and I continue to believe we should not cut off access to critically important therapies.

This legislation is a step in the right direction and I thank my colleague, Dr. Murphy for his years of hard work in this critical public policy area. I yield back.