



# THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

## MEMORANDUM

April 1, 2014

To: Members, Subcommittee on Health

From: Majority Committee Staff

Re: Hearing on H.R. 3717, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act of 2013

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On Thursday, April 3, 2014, the Subcommittee on Health will hold a hearing on H.R. 3717, Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act of 2013. The Subcommittee will convene at 10:30 a.m. in 2322 Rayburn House Office Building. Below is background on the hearing.

### I. WITNESSES<sup>1</sup>

- Michael Welner, M.D., Founder and Chairman, The Forensic Panel; and
- Sylvia Thompson, Patient Advocate, President – National Alliance on Mental Illness, Westside Los Angeles.

### II. BACKGROUND

Since the beginning of the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee has examined mental health resources and programs across throughout the Federal government to discern how Federal dollars devoted to research and treatment into mental illness are being prioritized and spent. The subcommittee's examination included public fora and hearings on issues such as: (1) the size and scope of the untreated serious mental illness problem, including the implications of the present shortage in outpatient community treatment options and inpatient psychiatric beds for patients, families, and communities; (2) how privacy laws may interfere with patient care and public safety; and, (3) how Federal resources appropriated for research into, and treatment of, mental illness are being spent and whether opportunities exist to reprogram funds to prioritize services assisting patients with the most serious mental illness.

Based on the findings of this extensive and wide-ranging examination, Chairman Murphy introduced H.R. 3717 to reorient Federal funding for mental health to improve the delivery of mental health services and help improve the lives of mental health patients and their families, especially those individuals with serious mental illness.

Specifically, the bill would establish a new position, the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health at the Department of Health and Human Services to oversee and coordinate the mental

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<sup>1</sup> Additional Witnesses may be added.

health work across the department, including the work of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The bill also proposes changes to privacy regulations that would allow parents and caregivers to access health and educational information when there is a threat of harm. Other provisions include reforms to Medicaid and Medicare that would ensure that mental health patients are not denied access to the best medications and treatment. Funds also would be made available to train law enforcement and college counselors to better address the needs of individuals with serious mental illness.

H.R. 4302, Protecting Access to Medicare Act of 2014, which was sponsored by Chairman Pitts and recently passed both the House and Senate, includes two important provisions of H.R. 3717. The first provision will help local jurisdictions implement assisted outpatient treatment grant programs for individuals with serious mental illness, and the second will establish a demonstration program to improve access to community mental health services.<sup>2</sup>

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Should you have any questions regarding the hearing, please contact Brenda Destro or Katie Novaria at 202-225-2927.

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<sup>2</sup> Additional background information on H.R. 3717 can be found here <http://murphy.house.gov/helpingfamiliesinmentalhealthcrisisact>.