April 1, 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

Re: Support for Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 (S. 2680)

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

The undersigned members of the Coalition for Mental Health Reform write to express our support for the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 (S.2680) as reported out of committee on March 16, 2016. The Coalition for Mental Health Reform is made up of disability, civil, and human rights organizations working with people with psychiatric disabilities for the improvement of legislative outcomes for mental health reform.

We all agree that the public mental health system is in need of reform and the services that people with psychiatric disabilities need are far too often unavailable. We also believe that the voices of people with psychiatric disabilities must be an important part of the reform in the legislative process. The organizations in this coalition work closely with and some are led by people with psychiatric disabilities. We think that S.2680 as reported out of committee would bring important improvements in the lives of people with psychiatric disabilities.

We also appreciate that the bill was carefully drawn to avoid troubling provisions that have been proposed elsewhere. For example, the bill’s focus on providing education to people with psychiatric disabilities, their families, and service providers concerning what types of disclosures are permitted under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) is a better and more effective approach than eliminating privacy protections that are critical for people with psychiatric disabilities. We applaud the bill’s recognition of the importance of reducing hospitalization and incarceration, and expanding access to employment and housing services, as well as mental health services provided to students in school. Significantly, the bill also acknowledges and
strengthens the critical work of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Finally, we appreciate that the bill also recognizes the crucial importance of the Protection and Advocacy (P&A)’s Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) program in protecting the rights of people with psychiatric disabilities.

Thank you all for your bipartisan work on these important mental health issues. We look forward to working with you to enact this legislation as reported out of committee. Please contact Dara Baldwin at dara.baldwin@ndrn.org or Jennifer Mathis at jenniferm@bazelon.org with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN)
The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
The Campaign for Real Change in Mental Health Policy
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors (NACBHD)
National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health (NCDVTMH)
National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery (NCMHR)
National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National LGBTQ Task Force
New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, Inc (NYAPRS)
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

cc: Senate HELP Committee Members
    The entire US Senate