



Working to Reduce Poverty in America.

June 13, 2016

The Honorable Fred Upton  
Chairman  
Energy and Commerce Committee  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Ranking Member  
Energy and Commerce Committee  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Upton and Ranking Member Pallone,

I write to you today on behalf of Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) regarding the urgent need to come together and address our nation’s ongoing mental health crisis.

Across our country 1 in 5 adults experience mental illness annually and 1 in 2 individuals experience some form of depression or anxiety. This reality is a reminder that mental illness is not a problem in the margins of society but a problem experienced in every family and community. The effects of mental illness also continue to be a major hurdle in our efforts to address poverty and promote social justice. Today, 26% of homeless adults living in shelters suffer from serious mental illness and 30% of those discharged from psychiatric hospitals end up homeless within six months of release. In addition, 20% of state prisoners and 21% of our local prisoners have had a recent history of mental illness. These numbers are a tragic reminder that, rather than treating those suffering with mental illness, we are relegating them to our streets or prisons.

CCUSA is a national membership organization representing 177 diocesan Catholic Charities member agencies and affiliated organization across the country and U.S. territories. Every day these agencies see the consequences of our failure to compassionately and effectively treat those with mental illness. Last year alone, in an effort to meet their communities’ needs, Catholic Charities agencies provided counseling, addiction treatment, and mental health services to over 400,000 clients. Despite these efforts, nearly 40% of these agencies reported a waiting list of individuals wanting to receive counseling or mental health services.

In my own capacity as a practicing clinical psychologist for the last 30 years, I have seen up close the ongoing crisis and the many ways that we as a nation have let down those suffering with mental illness and their families. I have treated the patient experiencing a psychotic episode; I have seen the life-affirming transformation of individuals given proper and timely treatment, counseling and care; and I have consoled the family members who have lost a son or daughter to suicide - unaware of their adult child’s struggle with severe depression. These experiences are a reminder that we as a nation can do better and must do better.

It gives me great hope to see the efforts underway to build bipartisan consensus to address these challenges. I thank you for your leadership and the leadership of Representatives Tim Murphy (R-PA) and Gene Green (D-Texas) to keep this issue at the forefront of your work. CCUSA and I stand ready to work with you to bring our ministries’ experiences to bear on these discussions so that we can promote meaningful and lasting reforms to our mental health system.

Sincerely,

Sr. Donna Markham, OP, PhD/ABPP  
President & CEO  
Catholic Charities USA

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The Most Reverend  
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Bishop of Pittsburgh

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