March 15, 2016

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate HELP Committee
430 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee
430 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, I am writing to commend you and your colleagues on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee for bringing forward bipartisan mental health legislation. As the nation’s largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans living with mental illness, NAMI applauds this movement in advancing bipartisan legislation.

This legislation includes a number of provisions designed to better coordinate policy across a range of federal agencies and programs and to advance adoption of evidence-based practice at the state level. The new Interdepartmental Serious Mental Illness Coordinating Committee will ensure an enhanced focus on advances in mental health care and on outcomes for people living with mental illness, such as rates of suicide, emergency room boarding, arrest, incarceration, homelessness and unemployment.

NAMI is pleased that this legislation emphasizes suicide prevention. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 15-24 and the tenth leading cause of death among adults. NAMI supports the telehealth child psychiatry access grants to improve access to children’s mental health expertise in primary care. NAMI also appreciates the set-aside of state block grant dollars to support evidence-based programs for early serious mental illness, including psychotic disorders, such as the RAISE study First Episode Psychosis (FEP) programs.

Finally, NAMI strongly recommends that the HELP Committee bill include substantial provisions to enforce the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA). Strong enforcement is necessary to improve health plan compliance with parity and expand needed access to mental health services.

Again, we appreciate the bipartisan efforts to craft this legislation. We look forward to continuing to work with you to strengthen and advance mental health reform.

Sincerely,

Mary Giliberti, J.D.
Executive Director