

Opening Statement of the Honorable Joseph R. Pitts
Subcommittee on Health
Hearing on “H.R. 3717, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act of 2013”
April 3, 2014

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Millions of Americans suffer with severe mental illnesses, such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and major depression, and many of them – and their families – struggle to find the treatment and help they desperately need.

I would like to commend my colleague from Pennsylvania, Dr. Murphy, for his year-long investigation into mental health issues and for proposing H.R. 3717, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act. Briefly, this bill would:

- Reform the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant Program by changing administration, improving data collection, and by requiring treatment standards to facilitate care;
- Enhance Medicaid payments to Federally Qualified Community Behavioral Health Centers (FQCBHCS);
- Make adjustments to HIPAA and FERPA (the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act) privacy regulations and expand access to certain medical records for qualifying caregivers;
- Create an Assistant Secretary for Mental Health who will be responsible for coordinating spending at all federal agencies on mental health, including at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA);
- Make changes to key Justice Department regulations that impact at-risk or imprisoned individuals with mental illness;
- Increase federal funding for certain Medicaid providers and research at the National Institutes of Health;
- Institute liability protections for physician volunteers at FQCBHCS; and
- Reform existing mental health programs at SAMHSA.

I would like to welcome all of our witnesses here today. We look forward to learning from your expertise and experience.

###