



**American Hospital
Association®**

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August 29, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
United States Capitol Building, S-230
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell:

On behalf of our nearly 5,000 member hospitals, health systems and other health care organizations, and our 43,000 individual members, the American Hospital Association (AHA) urges you to schedule a vote in the Senate on meaningful mental health reform legislation this fall.

We appreciate the bipartisan efforts of Sens. Cassidy, Murphy, Alexander and Murray in developing S. 2680, the Mental Health Reform Act, which was reported by the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee in April. Prompt Senate consideration of S. 2680 when Congress returns in September would allow ample time for the measure to be reconciled with H.R. 2646, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act, which passed the House overwhelmingly by a vote of 422-2.

America's hospitals play a central role in the delivery of behavioral health care and are uniquely positioned to help patients navigate the behavioral health resources that are available within their communities. Psychiatric and community hospitals are a vital source of care for behavioral health patients, providing treatment for a full range of psychiatric and substance abuse disorders by stabilizing patients, establishing and providing quality treatment regimens, and transitioning patients to outpatient and community-based services.

We are deeply concerned that the nation's behavioral health infrastructure is inadequate to meet the urgent needs of America's communities. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that 43 million Americans have at least one diagnosable mental disorder and nearly 10 million adults, or one in 25, have serious functional impairment due to mental illness. Unfortunately, weak enforcement of mental health parity laws, inadequate reimbursement and coverage of essential services, a declining number of inpatient psychiatric beds, and the severe shortage of mental health professionals have led to a crisis point in behavioral health care.



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Although additional measures will be necessary to resolve these difficult and longstanding challenges, we believe that the provisions of the Senate and House bills provide important reforms and a foundation on which future Congresses can build, and we therefore urge you to schedule S. 2680 for a vote as soon as possible.

With your leadership and broad support in Congress and from the provider and patient communities, Congress is poised to enact changes that will broaden access to quality behavioral health care for all Americans. We thank you for your consideration and look forward to continuing to work with you to advance meaningful reform. If you have any questions, please contact Priscilla A. Ross, senior associate director, at pross@aha.org or (202) 626-2677.

Sincerely,

//s//

Thomas P. Nickels
Executive Vice President