**DRAFT LETTER**

Dear Senator

We are writing today to urge that you support bicameral passage of important mental health reform legislation this year, specifically we urge you to support S. 2680. The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee voted unanimously to advance S. 2680, the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016, in April.  Notably, this bipartisan bill strengthens federal coordination of mental health resources, increases reporting on mental health parity, advances integrated service delivery, supports the mental health workforce, and increases early access to mental health services.

Of special interest to us is the opportunity that is created through Section 412, which compels the agency to conduct a study on the existing mental health and substance abuse workforce. We believe this study and subsequent report will clearly define the unmet workforce needs and bring to light the need for increased numbers of qualified mental health rehabilitation practitioners. These practitioners may or may not hold clinical licenses but are qualified by virtue of holding a nationally recognized credential as Certified Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioners (CPRP). We believe the advancement of this credential will greatly increase access to ethnically and linguistically diverse practitioners and evidence-based care and services that will improve the social and economic conditions of people with the most disabling behavioral health conditions.

Mental illness is widely prevalent in the United States. Over 68 million Americans have experienced mental illness in the past year which is more than 20 percent of the total population of the United States. Lifetime rates are much higher with some estimates approaching 50 percent. More striking, in 2014, nearly 43,000 Americans died by suicide. Many individuals with mental illness or substance use conditions are unable to access or receive the appropriate services and supports for these illnesses, and they remain constantly challenged by mental health service delivery systems that are largely fragmented and uncoordinated across the country.

The need for reform is urgent, and you have the opportunity to act now to improve the lives of tens of millions of Americans, their families, and our communities.  Please support bicameral passage of important mental health reform legislation this year.

Sincerely,