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Pallone Opening Statement for Full Committee Markup of H.R. 2646, Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act

Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks at an Energy and Commerce Committee markup on H.R. 2646, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act:

Good afternoon. Today we are meeting to markup an updated version of H.R. 2646, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act. At the legislative hearing on this bill, I expressed my hope that we could work together and find common ground to move bipartisan legislation forward that advanced the mental health system in this country. After months of hard work by both Democrats and Republicans, I am pleased that we have been able to achieve that goal. It was no secret that there were significant differences of opinion on some of the key provisions included in the original bill that was marked up last year in the Health Subcommittee, but I want to thank my Republican colleagues for continuing to meet with us and having the ongoing discussions needed to land at this bipartisan agreement.

The bill we are considering today represents a combination of the revised draft that Chairman Upton circulated on June 3, which eliminated policies that concerned many Democrats, and the addition of several provisions that Democrats advocated for to make the final bill more meaningful. These policies include new grant programs to address adult suicide and to create and disseminate model HIPAA training programs, and new provisions to strengthen compliance and enforcement of mental health parity.

While I am pleased with what we have been able to accomplish, I want to be clear that I do not believe this bill represents comprehensive mental health reform. And although it is a positive step forward, it is hardly a panacea for all the problems in our mental health system. For too long, our national infrastructure for treating mental health conditions has suffered from systemic fragmentation, neglect, and underinvestment. To truly address the resulting gap in

our treatment capacity, we will need to continue to make sustained investments and improvements. That means we must work to encourage all states to expand Medicaid and provide more resources to expand access to community-based mental health prevention, treatment, and recovery services across the country.

Finally, regardless of how comprehensive any mental health bill is, it is not a substitute for legislation to address the tragic instances of gun violence in this country. We're not going to begin to stop the violence until this Congress finally decides to address gun safety legislation.

Again, I thank Chairman Upton, Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Chairman Murphy, as well as the Democrats on the Committee, for all the hard work that was put into this important bill. I am committed to continuing work with you to see H.R. 2646 get signed into law.

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