



COMMITTEE ON  
**ENERGY & COMMERCE**  
DEMOCRATS  
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Pallone Remarks at 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Implementation Hearing**

**Washington, D.C.** – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Health hearing on “21st Century Cures Implementation: Examining Mental Health Initiatives:”*

It’s a critical function of this Committee to conduct oversight and ensure that the legislation we pass is working as intended. That’s why I do think it’s important to hold hearings like these that allow us to learn directly from the Administration how policies are being implemented.

In December 2016, President Obama signed the landmark 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act into law—which was truly a product of the hard work of bipartisan members of this Committee. As we know, the Cures Act addressed a wide range of issues facing our health care system. However, today we’ll be focusing on the provisions related to mental health—and I’d like to thank Dr. McCance-Katz for joining us today to testify on the important work happening at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act, which was ultimately passed as part of the Cures Act, was an important step towards repairing our country’s broken mental health system. I’d specifically like to highlight a provision I worked hard with my colleagues to include in the legislation that expanded an important set of Medicaid benefits to children receiving inpatient psychiatric treatment. But despite what was accomplished through this law, I think we’d all agree our work on this issue is far from complete and more needs to be done to improve access to affordable mental health treatment.

Unfortunately, in the time since we’ve passed the Cures Act the Republican party has been fixated on repealing the Affordable Care Act and cutting Medicaid—which is the single largest payer of mental health services in the country. For many people, Medicaid provides the only chance they have at getting treatment for a mental health disorder. I continue to believe that any progress made by the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act would be completely reversed if the Republicans ever succeed in their radical plans to repeal the Affordable Care Act and drastically cut Medicaid benefits for low income individuals. These actions would cause catastrophic harm to people with mental illness.

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And speaking of helping families in crisis, I'm reminded that this Committee has still not acted to help the thousands of families currently in crisis because of the Trump Administration's cruel family separation policy. The Administration recklessly moved ahead with this inhumane policy with little thought on how to address the long-term health implications for the children torn away from their parents or how to reunite them with their family. This is a man-made disaster by the Trump Administration.

Public health advocates and health care providers have already warned how devastating forcible separation can be to a child's mental health and overall development. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "highly stressful experiences, like family separation, can cause irreparable harm, disrupting a child's brain architecture and effecting his or her short- and long-term health. This type of prolonged exposure to serious stress – known as toxic stress – can lead to lifelong consequences for children."

As I said at the outset of my remarks, oversight is a critical function of this Committee and the fact that Chairman Walden refuses to hold an oversight hearing on the family separation crisis tells me that Chairman Walden and the Republican majority are simply not as troubled by this crisis as some of them claim to be—and I find that incredibly sad.

We must get to the bottom of how this happened so we can ensure it never happens again. We must reunite these families immediately – and while we can't undo the trauma that these children have already endured – the Administration must take every step possible to prevent further harm.

I yield back.

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