



NATIONAL SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

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April 17, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
United States Senate
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
United States Senate
260 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Stabenow and Senator Blunt:

I write on behalf of the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) and the more than 3,000 Sheriffs nationwide to express our support for the *Excellence in Mental Health Act* (S. 264). This bill would expand access to care at community mental health centers across this nation and hold the system accountable through higher standards.

Recent tragedies have forced us all to take a more serious look at our country's mental health system and its implications for public safety. Individuals with serious mental health conditions often lack access to care and, as sheriffs know all too well, the results can be disastrous. Not only are individuals with mental health conditions significantly overrepresented in the criminal justice system, but local law enforcement officers are often diverted from their regular duties to respond to psychiatric emergencies. In these situations, officers often lack specialized training to handle an individual with a serious mental health condition, placing the officer and the individual in a potentially dangerous situation. However, your bill would offer local criminal justice agencies, including sheriff's offices, better resources for managing a psychiatric emergency.

Your bill would establish criteria for Federally Qualified Community Behavioral Health Centers, including a requirement for 24-hour mobile crisis intervention teams; authorize prospective Medicaid payments; and support the modernization and construction of behavioral health centers. By ensuring improved access to care, your bill takes much needed steps to improving the safety of individuals with mental health conditions, law enforcement, and the public as a whole.

In conclusion, NSA thanks you for your efforts on the *Excellence in Mental Health Act*; and, we look forward to working with you on this and many other issues in the future.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aaron D. Kennard".

Sheriff (ret.) Aaron D. Kennard
Executive Director