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June 1, 2018

Chairman Greg Walden
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Frank Pallone
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Walden, and Ranking Member Pallone,

On behalf of the Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America (SARDA), we would like to express our deep concern with HR 5797, which lifts the Institutions for Mental Diseases (IMD) exclusion for certain individuals with opioid use disorders. **We appreciate the Committee's continued dedication to addressing the opioid epidemic, but SARDA has serious concerns that this legislation will continue discrimination against individuals with serious mental illness (SMI).**

SARDA has long opposed the Medicaid Institutions for Mental Diseases (IMD) exclusion, as it limits the effectiveness and length of care that can be offered in these settings. We support access to comprehensive treatment for all individuals with behavioral health conditions, including those with SMI, substance use disorder (SUD)/opioid use disorder (OUD), and individuals with co-occurring mental illness and substance use conditions. For example, during congressional consideration of the original Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act (HR 3717 in the 114th Congress), SARDA strongly supported provisions that eliminated the IMD provision for all behavioral health disorders, not just OUD and SUD. The IMD exclusion discriminates against people with schizophrenia, and other serious mental illness.

In our view, the IMD provisions perpetuate discrimination by only focusing on OUD, and not SMI. In order to generate SARDA's support, HR 5797 would need to be modified to include many of the original IMD provisions from the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act.

In order to adequately treat OUD and the underlying causes, as well as SMI, SARDA requests changes to this legislation to equitably address both, by lifting the IMD exclusion in its entirety; otherwise, we will be forced to oppose HR 5797 during House floor consideration.

Sincerely,

Linda Stalters, MSN, APRN (ret)
Chief Executive Officer & Founder
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America