

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 23, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader
522 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Reid,

We are in the midst of a mental health crisis in America. One in five Americans will experience mental illness this year. There are 10 million adults with a serious mental illness (SMI), but nearly 40% do not receive treatment. The reasons for this are a critical shortage of qualified providers, a dearth of crisis psychiatric beds, failed mental health parity implementation, and most importantly the absence of strong federal leadership. We are asking the Senate to pass the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act before their constituents work period break. Delays in enacting this into law will contribute to more crime, violence, homelessness, and the daily deaths of 959 American as a result of a mental illness. The level of this crisis was learned during the 4 year long House investigation, the major findings of which are listed below.

Critical Shortage of Qualified Providers

- There are 9,000 Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists for 17 million children with a mental health condition, but there is a need for 30,000;
- African Americans are half as likely to receive psychiatric treatment;
- For Hispanics with a mental disorder, fewer than 1 in 11 see a mental health specialist;
- 55% of counties do not have a practicing psychiatrist, psychologist, or social worker;
- 72% of states have a shortage of psychiatric nurses;
- Over the last decade the total number of physicians has increased by 45% but the number of psychiatrists has only increased 12%;
- The average time between onset of first symptoms of psychosis and first treatment is 80 weeks.

Dearth of Psychiatric Crisis Beds

- There is a nation-wide shortage of 100,000 crisis psychiatric beds;
- In 1955 there were 550,000 psychiatric beds, but today there are only 40,000;
- Only one state (Mississippi) has enough beds to meet the minimum standard;
- When patients are in crisis they are often diverted to jails, boarded in Emergency Rooms, or released without treatment.

Parity

- It has been nearly a decade since parity became law, yet there is no oversight, monitoring or enforcement;
- Americans with eating disorders still cannot get coverage of their treatment.

Failed Federal Leadership

- In the area of mental health, the federal government spends \$130 billion annually by 112 agencies across 8 separate departments;
- In a stunning and groundbreaking report the GAO exposed that federal mental health programs have nearly no coordination, few evaluations, and four out of five do not require evidence-based practices;
- 55% of Medicaid funding goes to 5% of the Medicaid population and nearly all of those patients has a mental health condition.

Violence

- While individuals with a mental health condition are NOT more violent than the general public, those with untreated psychosis are 15 times more likely to be violent when not in treatment;
- 80 percent of violent acts committed by those with untreated psychosis are attributable directly to their illness.

Criminal Justice

- Of those Americans in local jails 64% have mental illness, 56% in state prison, and 45% in federal prison;
- Mentally ill inmates cost taxpayers three-times more than those without a mental illness;
- Incarcerating someone with a mental illness is 20 times more expensive than community treatment;
- Over 70% of people in jails with serious mental illness also have a substance use disorder;
- Individuals with a mental illness are 4 to 6 times more likely to be the victim of sexual violence.

Homelessness and Poverty

- Over one-third of Americans experiencing homelessness have a serious mental illness;
- People with serious mental illness are three-times more likely to be in poverty.

Preventable Deaths

- Having a serious mental illness is worse for someone's health than chronic heavy smoking;
- Those with a serious mental illness die 10-25 years prematurely;
- There are 43,000 suicides, and 90% of those suicides have mental illness as a contributing factor;
- 350,000 Americans die each year as a direct or indirect result of a mental illness.

H.R. 2646

The Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act, the most transformational crisis mental health reform bill in 50 years, passed the House with near unanimous support on July 16, 2016 by a vote of 422-2. Our legislation delivers treatment before tragedy and fixes the problems above identified in the by the House investigations. The legislation:

- Reforms the federal government approach to mental health by establishing the critically important leadership position of Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders (who must be a doctor) to replace the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration;
- The Assistant Secretary will bring accountability, effectiveness, and coordination to the federal government's 112 mental health programs, and develop a national strategy for increasing the mental health workforce;
- Increases the number of providers for SMI by supporting postdoctoral psychologists, authorizing minority fellowships, allowing doctors to volunteer at federally qualified community health centers, and provides funding for tele-mental health to increase access in underserved areas;
- Provides additional psychiatric hospital beds for those experiencing an acute mental health crisis and in need of short term immediate inpatient care for stabilization;
- Requires oversight and enforcement of parity and extend parity coverage to eating disorders;
- Establishes a National Mental Health Policy Laboratory to set objective and scientific outcome measures for mental health spending;
- Authorizes the Suicide Prevention Hotline;
- Incentivizes states to provide community-based alternatives to jails, prisons, and institutionalization.

The Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act is the product of years of collaboration between dedicated members of Congress, as well as numerous organizations, who came together to offer feedback and suggestions. The bill has also been endorsed by more than 40 professional organizations, 77 editorial boards and newspapers, 207 bipartisan Members of Congress, and hundreds of individual physicians, patients, and families.

Given the urgency of the mental health crisis in America, we write with the vital request that the Senate take up and pass the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act before you break for constituent work period. We understand the nature of the short schedule during the month of September, but we maintain that fixing our nation's mental health system must take priority over

scheduling or any partisan divide. We know that every day more than 900 lives are lost in our nation due – directly or indirectly – to mental health. That translates to over 70,000 preventable deaths since the House passed H.R. 2646 in July.

At a time when thousands of lives are on the line, delays and politics cannot overrule compassion and common sense. We respectfully ask you to advance this bill to provide treatment before tragedy, and H.R. 2646 will provide desperately needed, and fully deserved, help. We call on you to pass H.R. 2646 because where there is help, there is hope.

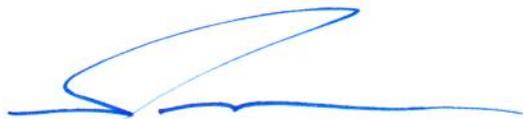
Sincerely,



Tim Murphy, PhD



Eddie Bernice Johnson, RN



Tom Reed



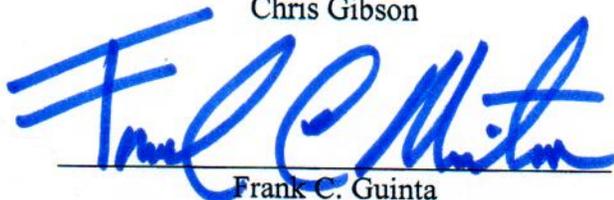
Carlos Curbelo



Chris Gibson



Marcy Kaptur



Frank C. Guinta



Doug LaMalfa



Scott Tipton



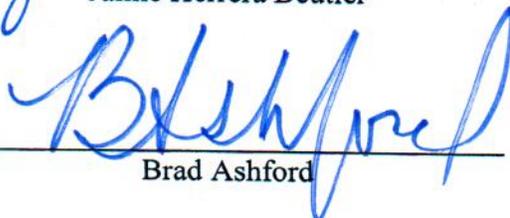
David Joyce



Jaime Herrera Beutler



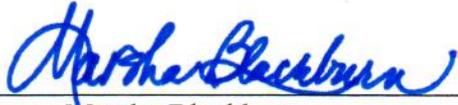
Joe Pitts



Brad Ashford



Edward R. Royce



Marsha Blackburn



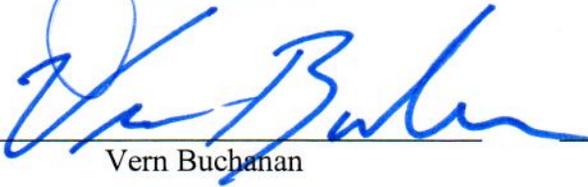
Tom Emmer



Jim McDermott



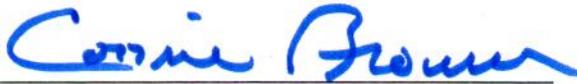
Earl Blumenauer



Vern Buchanan



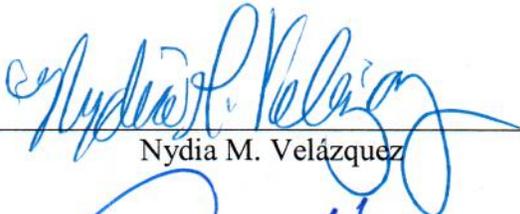
Jeff Denham



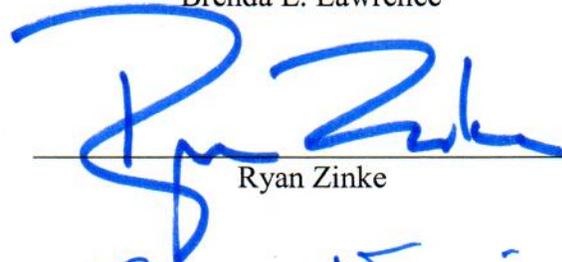
Corrine Brown



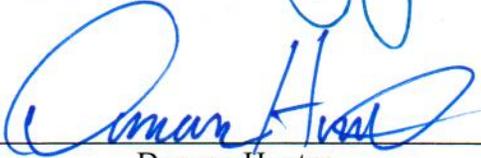
Brenda L. Lawrence



Nydia M. Velázquez



Ryan Zinke



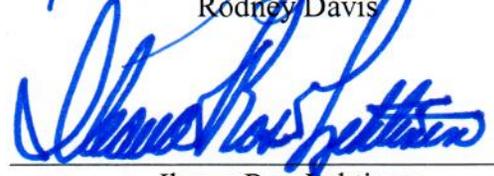
Duncan Hunter



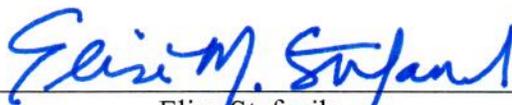
Rodney Davis



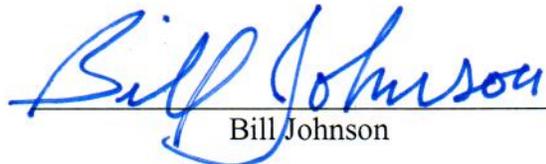
Ken Calvert



Ileana Ros-Lehtinen



Elise Stefanik



Bill Johnson



Ann Kirkpatrick



Peter J. Roskam



Susan W. Brooks



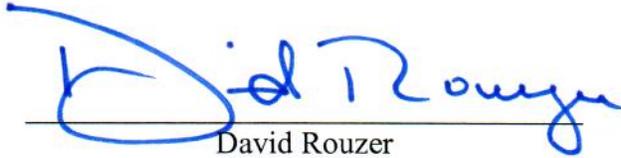
Renee Ellmers



Kyrsten Sinema



Filemon Vela



David Rouzer



Gus M. Bilirakis



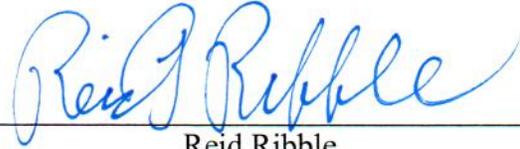
Suzanne Bonamici



Crescent Hardy



Mike Conaway



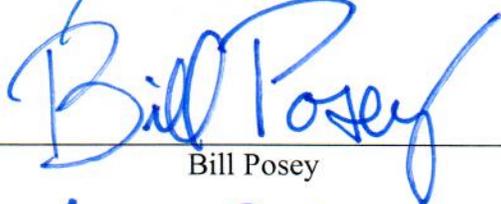
Reid Ribble



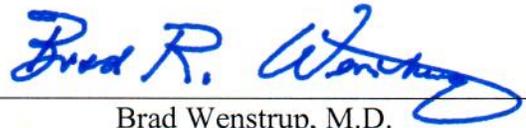
Richard Hanna



Dennis Ross



Bill Posey



Brad Wenstrup, M.D.



Mike Coffman



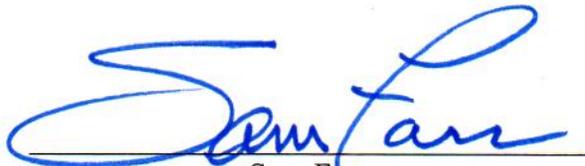
Phil Roe, M.D.

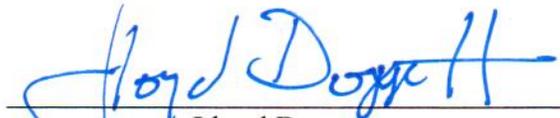


Steve Pearce



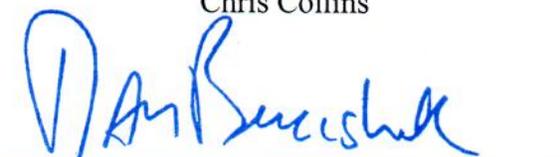
Steve Stivers

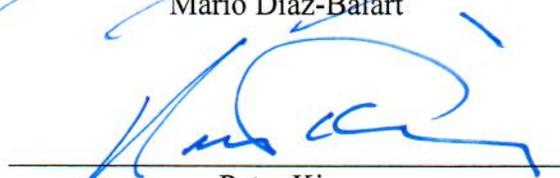

Sam Farr

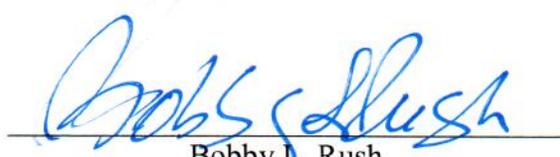

Lloyd Doggett


Chris Collins


Mario Diaz-Balart


Dan Benishek, M.D.


Peter King


Bobby L. Rush


Robert J. Dold


Keith Rothfus

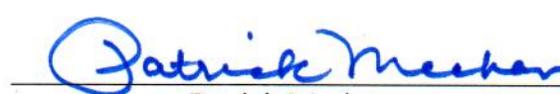

Glenn 'GT' Thompson


Scott Rigell

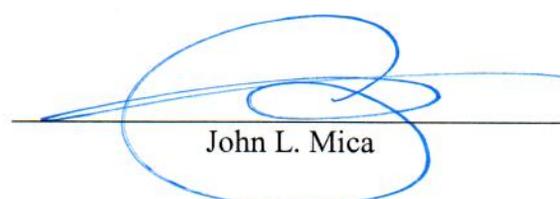

Robert A. Brady


Larry Bucshon M.D.


Darin LaHood


Patrick Meehan


Bill Shuster


John L. Mica


Lou Barletta

Tom Marino
Thomas Marino

Chris Van Hollen
Chris Van Hollen

John Katko
John Katko

Brett Guthrie
Brett Guthrie

Billy Long
Billy Long

Richard M. Nolan
Richard M. Nolan

Adam Kinzinger
Adam Kinzinger

Andy Barr
Andy Barr

Steve Knight
Steve Knight

Kevin Cramer
Kevin Cramer

David Schweikert
David Schweikert

Walter B. Jones
Walter B. Jones

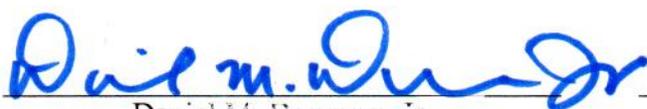
Robert Hurt
Robert Hurt

Trent Franks
Trent Franks

Charles W. Boustany, Jr., M.D.
Charles W. Boustany, Jr., M.D.

Ted Lieu
Ted Lieu

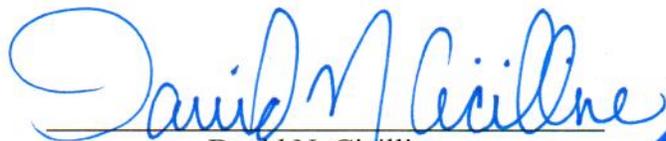
Diane Black
Diane Black



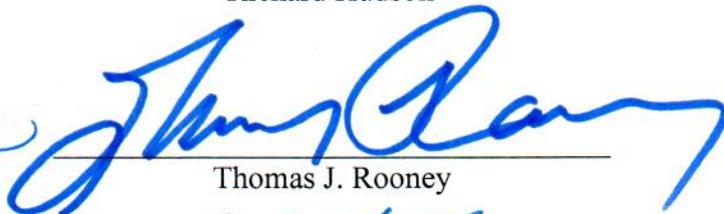
Daniel M. Donovan Jr



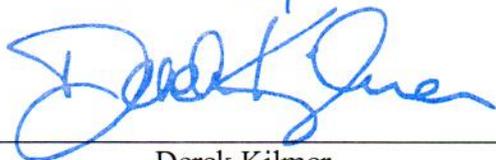
Richard Hudson



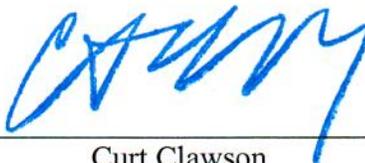
David N. Cicilline



Thomas J. Rooney



Derek Kilmer



Curt Clawson



David W. Jolly



Dina Titus



Ami Bera



French Hill



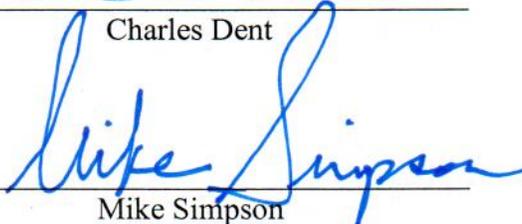
Ann McLane Kuster



Charles Dent



Brett Guthrie



Mike Simpson



Evan Jenkins



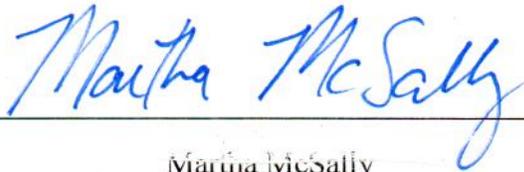
Frank Lucas



Pete Olson



Jackie Walorski



Martha McSally



Mark Meadows



Gwen Graham



Ron DeSantis



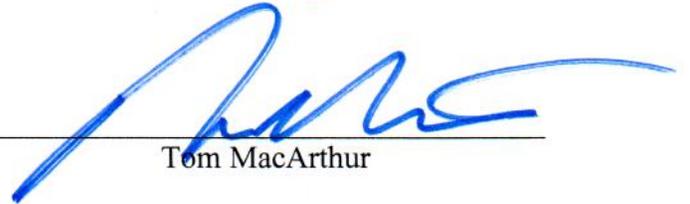
Ralph Abraham M.D.



Sean Duffy



Gregg Harper



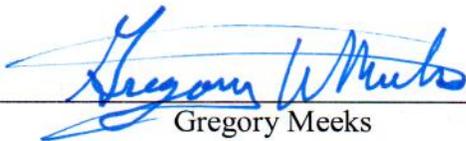
Tom MacArthur



Kurt Schrader



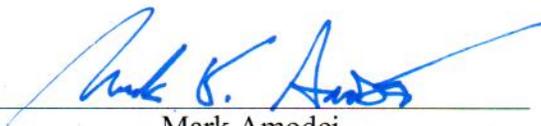
Mark Walker



Gregory Meeks



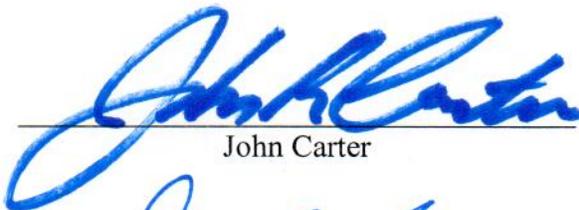
Mike Kelly



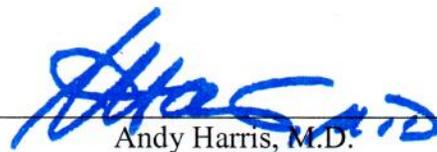
Mark Amodei



Kay Granger



John Carter



Andy Harris, M.D.



Jason Smith



Bruce Westerman

Tim Walberg

Tim Walberg

Devin Nunes

Devin Nunes

Mac Thornberry

Mac Thornberry

Darrell Issa

Darrell Issa

Mike Bost

Mike Bost

Joe Wilson

Joe Wilson

Ryan Costello

Ryan Costello

Barbara Comstock

Barbara Comstock

David McKinley

David McKinley

Michael Burgess, M.D.

Michael Burgess, M.D.

Tom Rice

Tom Rice

Randy Neugebauer

Randy Neugebauer

Rob Woodall

Rob Woodall

Bob Gibbs

Bob Gibbs

Joe Barton

Joe Barton

Tom Graves

Tom Graves

Chris Stewart

Chris Stewart

Tom Price, M.D.

Tom Price, M.D.

Erik Paulsen

Erik Paulsen

Kristi Noem

Kristi Noem

Ann Wagner

Ann Wagner

Sam Graves

Sam Graves

Tom McClintock

Tom McClintock

Dave Reichert

Dave Reichert

Frank A. LoBiondo

Frank A. LoBiondo

Bill Huizenga

Bill Huizenga

Gregory Meeks

Gregory Meeks

Debbie Dingell

Debbie Dingell

David Young

David Young

Ted Yoho

Ted Yoho

John Conyers

John Conyers

Morgan Griffith

Morgan Griffith

Mike Bishop

Mike Bishop

Madeleine Bordallo

Madeleine Bordallo

Peter DeFazio

Peter DeFazio

Raul Ruiz

Raul Ruiz



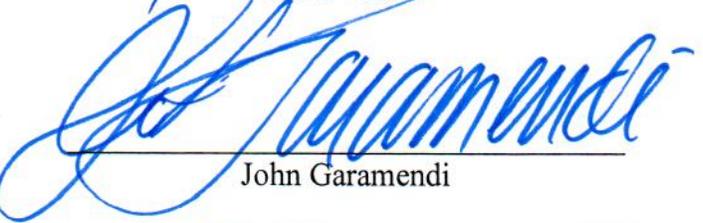
Scott Garrett



Steve Cohen



Leonard Lance



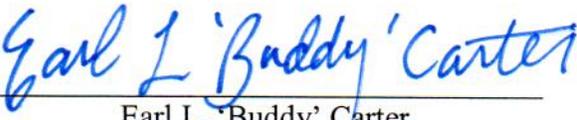
John Garamendi



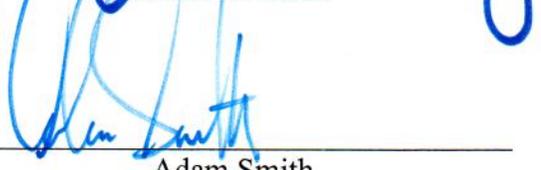
Bill Flores



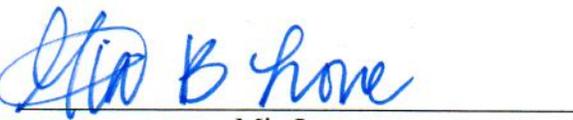
John J. Duncan



Earl L. 'Buddy' Carter



Adam Smith



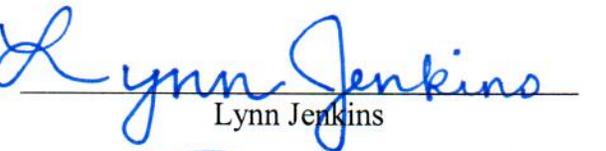
Mia Love



Eric Swalwell



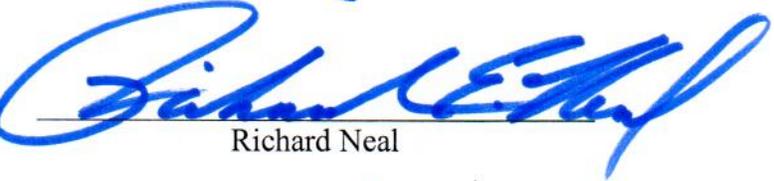
Donald Norcross



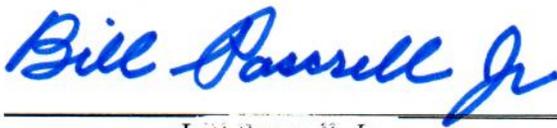
Lynn Jenkins



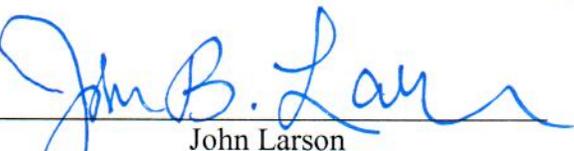
Cedric Richmond



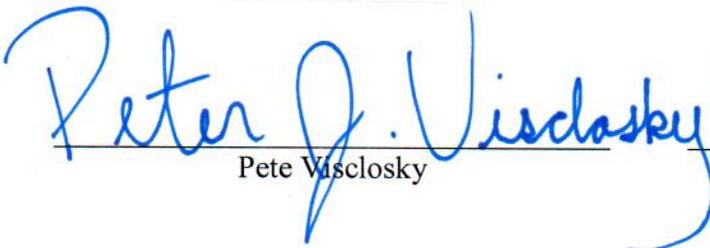
Richard Neal



Bill Pascrell, Jr



John Larson



Pete Visclosky



Scott Peters

Tim Ryan
Tim Ryan

Terri Sewell
Terri Sewell

Elijah Cummings
Elijah Cummings

Frederica J Wilson
Frederica Wilson

Hank Johnson
Hank Johnson

Sheila Jackson Lee
Sheila Jackson Lee

Gerry Connolly
Gerry Connolly

Barbara Lee
Barbara Lee

Chris Smith
Chris Smith

Kevin Yoder
Kevin Yoder

Steve Womack
Steve Womack

Brian Higgs
Brian Higgs

Henry Cuellar
Henry Cuellar

Bruce Poliquin
Bruce Poliquin

Roger Williams
Roger Williams

Gary Palmer
Gary Palmer

Tom Cole
Tom Cole

Greg Walden
Greg Walden

Markwayne Mullin

Markwayne Mullin

Bob Goodlatte

Bob Goodlatte

Michael R. Turner

Michael R. Turner

Ruben Hinojosa

Ruben Hinojosa

Sanford Bishop

Sanford Bishop

Karen Bass

Karen Bass

Marcia L. Fudge

Marcia Fudge

Alcee Hastings

Alcee Hastings

G.E. Butterfield

G.E. Butterfield

James E. Clyburn

James Clyburn

Rob Bishop

Rob Bishop

Jeff Fortenberry

Jeff Fortenberry

Emanuel Cleaver

Emanuel Cleaver

Robin Kelly

Robin Kelly

C.A. Dutch Ruppberger

C.A. Dutch Ruppberger

Mike Quigley

Mike Quigley

Bradley Byrne

Bradley Byrne