

Opening Statement
Nomination Hearing for Dr. Elinore F. McCance-Katz, M.D.
Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee
Chairman Lamar Alexander
August 1, 2017

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the Committee, I am honored to be here today. I want to thank you for inviting me here today to consider my nomination as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use.

I come from a family that has placed service to our country as their highest calling, starting with my late grandfather, William J. McCance, who served in World War II and participated in both the North African and the D-Day invasions. My father, William Thomas McCance, is a career Navy submarine force veteran who rose to the highest enlisted ranks as Master Chief Hospital Corpsman. My mother, Anna McCance, as the wife of a Navy Chief of the Boat, comforted and cared for the families of sailors on the submarines on which my father served—faithfully demonstrating that spouses also share in the defense of our nation.

I am happy to have my husband, Michael Katz, here with me today as well as my daughters, Anna and Heather. My son, Josh, could not be here. They have all been a source of support and joy. Service to our country was modeled to me in my family and I look forward to continuing this tradition, if I am confirmed.

I am a psychiatrist, and I am subspecialized in Addiction Psychiatry. From my 30 years caring for patients, I have had the opportunity to learn a significant amount about mental and substance use disorders. I have also had the opportunity to work in both state and federal government, so I have unique insight into the challenges the current regulatory regime poses for assisting people with these illnesses—experiences that I believe have helped prepare me to implement the statutes enacted by Congress and signed into law by the President.

Our country faces very serious challenges in mental health and substance use, and the position for which I am being considered heralds a new era in the treatment and care needs of Americans through recent landmark legislation including the 21st Century CURES Act and the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. These laws, in addition to other Congressional legislative guidance, will allow more effective use of federal funds at SAMHSA and coordination of funding initiatives at other agencies to better serve Americans. If confirmed, I would prioritize two areas: addressing the opioid epidemic and focusing on those with serious mental illness.

Our nation is afflicted by a crisis of opioid addiction, overdose and death. Sadly, to a large extent, this is a crisis that has grown out of ill-informed and misguided attempts to address issues of pain. Data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health tell us that 54 percent of misusers obtained opioid medications free from friends and relatives while 34 percent admit to misusing opioids prescribed by their doctor for pain management. The data teaches important lessons about prevention and treatment issues. We must educate Americans on safe and appropriate use of pain medications. Innovative approaches to healthcare practitioner training should address effective pain management, identification and treatment of substance use disorders as well as frequently co-occurring mental disorders. Increasing

access to care and recovery services is critically important to addressing the opioid epidemic. Evidence-based medication-assisted treatment, peer specialists and a growing array of community supports are essential underpinnings of recovery and form the basis of a collaborative care model that can best serve Americans.

For too long, the care and treatment needs of the most seriously mentally ill Americans have been neglected. SAMHSA national survey data indicates that 35 percent of Americans with the most serious mental illnesses receive no treatment whatsoever. In addressing this, SAMHSA must assure that program funding supports evidence-based early intervention, treatment and recovery services. We are fortunate to have stakeholders from many complementary disciplines who are ready and willing to collaborate and help meet this goal. We must focus on evidence-based services including psychiatric care, medication and psychotherapy treatments, in collaboration with peer support and other community-based services designed to provide the resources needed to assure the best possible outcomes. We must also work to include the families of those with serious mental illness in the discussion of their loved one's needs. If confirmed, I would look forward to working with Congress and stakeholder groups on how to share information urgently needed to assure care and safety of a person while also paying attention to their privacy rights.

If confirmed, I will be attentive to the concerns of Congress. I look forward to your guidance and input, and I will work very hard to implement Congress's vision informed by stakeholders and enacted through legislation. I look forward to answering your questions.