



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MOMENTUM BUILDS TO REDUCE THE CRIMINALIZATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS

(ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA) In the wake of another mass shooting that left eight dead in Roseburg, Oregon, Representative Martha McSally (R-AZ) today introduced the *Mental Health and Safe Communities Act*. The new House bill serves as a companion to the [Senate bill introduced by John Cornyn](#) (R-TX) in August.

McSally represents the 2nd District of Arizona, where in 2011 Jared Loughner killed six people and wounded 14, including former U.S. Representative Gabby Giffords. Loughner, who has been diagnosed with schizophrenia, was sentenced to seven consecutive life sentences in 2012. He is now one of the more than [350,000 individuals with a mental illness in our nation's jails and prisons](#).

The *Mental Health and Safe Communities Act* would enhance the ability of local communities to provide care for people with mental illness before a tragedy occurs, and drastically improve options to divert people with a psychiatric disease into treatment before they come into contact with the criminal justice system.

Treatment Advocacy Center Executive Director John Snook said about the legislation: "Representative McSally recognizes that our nation's jails and prisons are the worst places to treat people with severe mental illness. For too long, our nation's mental health system has failed those in need and law enforcement has been left to pick up the pieces. It is inhumane, not effective and too often the consequences are tragic."

"We are encouraged that leaders in the U.S. House and the Senate are championing mental health reform and actively working to keep those with a mental illness out of jails and prisons where they don't belong," the executive continued. "The status quo is unacceptable."

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The [Treatment Advocacy Center](#) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating barriers to the timely and effective treatment of severe mental illness. The organization promotes laws, policies and practices for the delivery of psychiatric care and supports the development of innovative treatments for and research into the causes of severe and persistent psychiatric illnesses, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.