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Former Rep. Patrick Kennedy today criticized his former Democratic colleagues and the Substance and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) over their opposition to legislation aimed at improving coordination of treatment for the mentally ill.

Democrats on the House Energy and Commerce Committee last week voiced their objections to the Family Crisis Mental Health Bill championed by GOP Rep. Tim Murphy over measures that would cut SAMHSA funding, lower privacy restrictions and in some case impose involuntary treatment.

The bill has 149 co-sponsors and supporters hope to get it marked up within a few weeks.

Kennedy, sponsor of the 2008 Mental Health Parity Act and a recovering drug abuser, was upset that fellow Democrats opposed the bill.

"The fact that all they can do is come up with what they oppose, rather than presenting an alternative, is indefensible," he said at a health IT conference outside Washington. "Democrats should be all over this issue. The poor care of the mentally ill has negative impact throughout the public health system."

"SAMHSA has been gunning up its providers to oppose the bill," he charged. "It's a taxpayer-funded campaign."

SAMHSA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"We have to frame this as medical civil rights," Kennedy said earlier, on a panel run by the IT company Netsmart. "People like myself in recovery are being discriminated against. We're not benefiting from advances in coordinated care that our brothers and sisters with kidney disease and cancer get."