

Mental Health Liaison Group

April 6, 2009

The Honorable Edward Kennedy
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Kennedy:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG)— a national mental health advocacy coalition representing children and adults with mental illness, professionals, providers, families and advocates— we are writing to express our support for the Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Act.

As you know, long-term care services are playing an increasingly critical role in providing care to a growing population of individuals, including those with a mental illness. However, most Americans are not prepared for the costs of long-term services and supports when they arise. High premiums have discouraged many Americans from purchasing long-term care insurance in the private market. Furthermore, underwriting practices have excluded individuals with existing disabilities from purchasing plans. The CLASS Act provides options to purchase long-term care insurance through a national program. By pooling risk, the CLASS Act will provide more affordable premiums, including those for working individuals with disabilities.

The majority of Americans want to receive long-term services and supports in their homes. The CLASS Act provides consumer-directed benefits that will allow individuals to purchase the services and supports that best meet their needs. The CLASS Act will help support families to remain together. It will support individuals with disabilities, including those with a mental illness to age in place and remain productive members of their communities. It will reduce placements in costly nursing homes and other institutions.

Nearly 10 million Americans need long-term care services and supports to assist them with activities of daily living. Enormous strain is already being placed on the Medicaid program, which currently finances over 40% of all long-term care. The CLASS Act will help relieve growing pressures on the Medicaid program and promote a balance of private and public responses to meet the future needs of our country.

We look forward to working with you to enact this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Laurel Stine, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, 1101 15th Street, NW, #1212, Washington, DC 20005

American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for the Advancement of Psychiatry
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness-NAMI
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders-ANAD
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of School Psychologists
National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Foundation for Mental Health
Therapeutic Communities of America
Tourette Syndrome Association, Inc.
United Neighborhood Centers of America
U.S Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association