

Mental Health Liaison Group

April 18, 2007

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), we are writing to express our support for the Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Act. As organizations representing people with mental illness, professionals, providers, families and advocates, we are pleased to endorse this important legislation.

As you know, disability is a natural part of the human experience. 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 working individuals with disabilities.

The CLASS Act embraces principles valued by the organizations in the MHLG. 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 to 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 also 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

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
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
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 Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of School Psychologists
National Coalition of Mental Health Professionals and Consumers
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
Tourette Syndrome Association, Inc.
United Jewish Communities