

Mental Health Liaison Group

May 9, 2006

The Honorable Richard Durbin
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Blanche L. Lincoln
355 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Durbin and Lincoln:

The undersigned organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group are writing to express our support for S. 2510, the Small Employers Health Benefits Program (SEHBP) Act. We recognize the difficulty that small business owners and other small non-profit entities face in attempting to provide affordable health insurance to their employees. Your legislation addresses that issue while preserving the important protections enacted in states to ensure access to comprehensive health benefits, including mental health services.

S. 2510 would make insurance for small purchasers more affordable by providing for shared insurance risk through a large nationwide pool. In stark contrast, competing bills would undermine the vital insurance principle of shared risk and, as a result, drive up costs for many. S. 2510 takes another step to achieve affordability for all patients by prohibiting insurers from charging higher premiums based on health status, gender or industry, while allowing states to require greater protections.

Most importantly, S. 2510 does not sacrifice quality of coverage for affordability or allow the offering of second-class health insurance to small businesses. Within the SEHBP program, small business owners, employees and their family members would be covered by all of the consumer protections in their home states — including hard-won state mental health parity laws and mandated benefit laws. In addition to preserving access to comprehensive health services for consumers, S. 2510 preserves the crucial role of states as health insurance regulators and laboratories of innovation.

The Mental Health Liaison Group is committed to helping the millions of Americans without health insurance — many of whom own or work for small businesses. We are very pleased to support legislation that will both help entities that cannot now afford health insurance while maintaining critical state consumer-protection laws, including those protecting people with or at risk of mental health problems.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association of Pastoral Counselors

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Peter Newbould, American Psychological Association Practice Organization, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002

American Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Federation
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental 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 Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Mental Health Association
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA
Therapeutic Communities of America