

Mental Health Liaison Group

May 27, 2003

The Honorable Patrick J. Kennedy
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Kennedy:

The undersigned health and mental health organizations are writing to offer our support for the "Positive Aging Act of 2003," which you have reintroduced as H.R. 2241.

It is estimated that nearly 20 percent of those over age 55 experience mental illnesses that are not a part of normal aging. While many older Americans experience depression, dementia, anxiety and substance abuse disorders, far too often these conditions are not recognized or treated. Failure to treat these disorders leads to functional dependence, nursing homes, poorer health outcomes for other chronic conditions, and even suicide. In fact, older adults have the highest rate of suicide compared to any other age group. Studies show that 40 percent of older people who have committed suicide had a visit with their primary care provider within one week of their death and 70 percent within 30 days. Knowledge about how to diagnose mental illness and effective treatments is simply not reaching our front-line health care professionals.

Your bill addresses these issues by authorizing the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to fund projects that integrate mental health screening and treatment services for seniors at community health centers and other public or private nonprofit primary care clinics. In addition, SAMHSA is authorized to support geriatric mental health outreach teams in settings where seniors live or receive social services, such as senior centers, adult day care programs and assisted living facilities.

Making mental health services an integral part of primary care services by enhancing access to them in settings where our seniors live and gather can dramatically improve the quality of life of older Americans. We commend you for your leadership in this area and look forward to working with you to achieve enactment of this important legislation.

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 for Psychosocial Rehabilitation
American Association of Children's Residential Centers
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association of Practicing Psychiatrists

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 Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work
American Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses 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
Central Conference of American Rabbis
Child Welfare League of America
Clinical Social Work Federation
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Employee Assistance Professionals Association
Federation of Behavioral, Psychological & Cognitive Sciences
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders -- ANAD
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Coalition of Mental Health Consumers and Professionals
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Mental Health Association
Tourette Syndrome Association
Union of American Hebrew Congregations