

Mental Health Liaison Group

June 8, 2007

The Honorable Christopher Dodd
448 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bart Gordon
2310 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Dodd and Representative Gordon:

The undersigned organizations are pleased to write in support of the legislation you recently introduced (S. 1514/H.R. 2511) to reauthorize the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act. On October 21, 2004, our nation took an historic step toward ending youth suicide when the President signed into law the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial (GLSM) Act (P.L. 108-355). The authorization expires at the end of Fiscal Year 2007.

However, as you know, there is still much work to be done with respect to suicide prevention and early intervention efforts among our nation's youth. In 2004, the year before GLSM grants were first distributed, suicide among individuals under 19 years of age increased by 18%. Thus, we are pleased that you have worked with your colleagues Senators Gordon Smith and Jack Reed, as well as Representatives Danny Davis and Greg Walden to introduce a five year reauthorization bill.

Each year more than 4,000 Americans between the ages of 15 to 24 years die by suicide, making suicide the third leading cause of death for this age group. This is a startling statistic, made even more alarming when you consider that 70% of people who die by suicide tell someone about it in advance. Yet, most of these young people have not received any sort of counseling or treatment. This law is the first step to target funding to states, tribes, and our colleges and universities to address youth suicide.

MHLG supports the bill's three primary elements. A total of \$210 million over five years will be authorized to help states and tribes develop and implement statewide youth suicide early intervention and prevention strategies, raise awareness, educate people about mental illness and the risk of suicide, help identify young people with mental illnesses, and allow states to expand access to treatment options. Since the program's inception, 29 states and seven tribes have utilized GLSM grants to achieve these goals. The bill's funding levels will allow states and tribes that have not received a grant the opportunity to receive one, and also allow states that have completed a grant, but need additional funds to continue their successful programs an opportunity to do so.

In addition, a total of \$31 million over five years will be authorized to fund a matching-grant program to colleges and universities to help raise awareness about youth suicide, as well as enable those institutions to train students and faculty to identify and intervene when youth are in crisis, and develop a system to refer students for care. Recent tragic events underscore the need for this program. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to ensure that the

college/university grant program is best able to meet the documented needs that exist on campuses across the country. So far, only 55 universities have received grants through GLSM. Finally, the Suicide Prevention Technical Assistance Center will be reauthorized.

The MHLG appreciates your commitment to preventing suicide and looks forward to working with you to ensure that S. 1514 and H.R. 2511 pass their respective houses and the legislation becomes law.

Sincerely,

Active Minds
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
American Association of Suicidology
American Counseling Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association of Jewish Family & Children's Agencies
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Child Welfare League of America
Center for Clinical Social Work
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
The Jason Foundation
The Jed Foundation
Mental Health America
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 Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Black Police Association
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide
State and Territorial Injury Prevention Directors Association
Suicide Awareness Voices of Education
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA)
Therapeutic Communities of America
Tourette Syndrome Association
UJA Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York
United Jewish Communities
U.S. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association