

Mental Health Liaison Group

June 29, 2004

The Honorable Mike DeWine
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ted Strickland
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator DeWine and Representative Strickland:

The undersigned organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group are pleased to support your legislation, the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act (S. 1194/H.R. 2387).

In establishing his New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, President Bush pointed to the tragedy faced by many Americans with mental illnesses who fall through the cracks of the current system and unnecessarily land in the criminal and juvenile justice systems. According to a landmark 1999 Department of Justice report, 16 percent of all adult inmates in our prisons and jails suffer from serious mental illnesses; 70 percent of those persons had been convicted of a non-violent offense. And, according to the President's Commission, an astounding 80 percent of youth entering the juvenile justice system have a mental disorder. Many offenders also have a disorder co-occurring with substance abuse.

S. 1194/H.R. 2387 targets this problem by providing resources to states and communities to support and expand programs that divert people with mental illness from the criminal justice system and connect them to effective mental health services. The bill would be designed and implemented by partnerships consisting of judges, prosecutors, sheriffs, corrections officers and mental health professionals, as well as mental health consumers and their families.

This bill would strengthen services to those with mental disorders, whose providers should consult with substance abuse service providers as appropriate. Such programs might include specialized training programs for personnel in law enforcement, substance abuse, the courts, and corrections systems, trained crisis intervention teams, professional mobile crisis teams, pretrial diversion programs, dispositional alternatives linked to provision of needed services and supports; and collaborative, effective re-entry programs.

We have seen how these collaborations have freed up law enforcement, justice and corrections resources while helping mentally ill offenders to return to productive lives. Indeed, the legislation enjoys broad support from a wide variety of organizations, ranging from those charged with promoting public safety and maintaining robust criminal justice systems to those whose primary focus is on health care.

We are gratified that the House Judiciary Committee is preparing to act on this bill quickly. This support, combined with the momentum generated by the unanimous approval of the bill in the Senate last fall, will assure the enactment of this important legislation.

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

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
American Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Hospital Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Coalition of Mental Health Consumers and Professionals
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Mental Health Association
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA
Therapeutic Communities of America
United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association