

Mental Health Liaison Group

July 3, 2002

Honorable Patrick J. Kennedy
407 Cannon House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Marge Roukema
2469 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Kennedy and Roukema:

The undersigned national mental health advocacy organizations to express support for the Extended Disaster Mental Health Services Act, H.R. 3413, important legislation you have introduced in the House.

As has been widely reported, the psychological trauma of the events on September 11th has had a far-reaching impact on people's mental health, not only in the states in which the terrorist attacks occurred, but also across the nation. Extensive reporting has documented the widespread experience among adults and children of disrupted sleep patterns, panic attacks, pervasive anxiety and emotional trauma.

A recently published study highlights not only the need to initiate mental health programs in response to September 11th, but also the critical importance of mounting a national preparedness plan to respond to the devastating impact that terrorist attacks have on people's mental health. That study was conducted by the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and Applied Research, in consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to gauge the psychological impact of the September 11 attacks on New York City schoolchildren. It concluded that nearly 75,000 New York City children are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and 200,000 children have at least some symptoms of mental health problems stemming from the attacks. As compelling as these New York City findings are, the lessons of the Oklahoma City experience also tell us that children geographically distant from the disaster who did not directly experience an interpersonal loss report PTSD symptoms and functional impairment.

Since September 11th, mental health experts and administrators at all levels of government have worked to assess the mental health consequences of terrorist attacks, and consensus has emerged on the following:

- ◆ the psychological trauma caused by terrorist attacks will be more severe and felt more widely than any other disasters in American history;
- ◆ left unaddressed, the mental health consequences of such attacks will increase and intensify with the passage of time;

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

◆ although mental disorders following catastrophic events are readily treatable, our mental health systems do not have the resources to meet these needs and face still further strain in light of state budget shortfalls; and

◆ we must prepare for the likelihood that this country will experience terrorist attacks with catastrophic consequences in the near future.

The Extended Disaster Mental Health Services Act would help ensure that states are prepared to respond quickly and appropriately to the mental health needs following acts of terrorism and other disasters. H.R. 3413 would provide for the appropriate ongoing treatment and services for individuals affected by terrorism and other disasters, something not currently provided by federal disaster relief. It would also ensure that states have an adequate supply of trained mental health professionals to provide these services. Finally, it would provide grants to states to develop statewide mental health disaster plans.

We look forward to states to being able provide adequate mental health services to those in need by the passage and funding of the Extended Disaster Mental Health Services Act. Thank you for your leadership.

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 Pastoral Counselors
American Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological 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
Child Welfare League of America
Clinical Social Work Federation
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services

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 Directors
National Association of School Nurses
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 Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association
National Mental Health Association
National Network for Youth
Tourette Syndrome Association
Treatment and Research Advancements Association for Personality Disorder