

# Mental Health Liaison Group

July 16, 2008

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
United States Senate  
433 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention  
(JJDP), S 3155

Dear Chairman Leahy:

The undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition representing the broad, diverse mental health community serving adults and children with mental illness, and their families are writing in support of S. 3155, to Reauthorize and Improve the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974. We strongly urge you to improve and expand upon provisions in S. 3155 that would significantly help address the shameful plight of too many young people with mental disorders intersecting with the juvenile justice system. In fact, studies have shown that 70 percent of youth in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental health disorder. Clearly, given this alarming statistic, decreasing this significant prevalence and appropriately reducing juvenile crime is a priority, and the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act is the right opportunity to undertake this work.

We urge you to build upon S. 3155 by including a set of mental health-specific improvements that has long been championed by Sen. Kennedy, and other Members of Congress, and supported by the broader mental health community. Given the prevalence data and the availability of cost-effective, evidence based programs to deal with mental health disorders, this reauthorization is ripe for making a dramatic shift in how we deal with this vulnerable population.

Specifically, we urge you to consider adding four provisions:

- a. establish grants for partnerships between state and local juvenile justice agencies and state and local mental health authorities (or appropriate children service agencies) for diversion and treatment programs;
- b. establish grants to provide training to individuals involved in making decisions regarding the disposition of cases involving youth who enter the juvenile justice system; and
- c. establish grants to develop comprehensive collaborative plans to address the service needs of juveniles with mental health or substance abuse disorders who come into contact with the justice system or who are at risk of coming into contact with the justice system.

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers  
c/o Laurel Stine, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, 1101 15<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, #1212, Washington, DC 20005

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- d. establish a protection and advocacy (P&A) program to monitor conditions of confinement in facilities where youth with disabilities are incarcerated, and compliance with the core protections of the JJDPA.

We commend your continued leadership in addressing the nation's crisis of youth in, or at risk of, confinement or detention -- an ever-growing number of whom have mental health problems. We are encouraged by your introduction of S. 3155 and your efforts to address an array of compounding issues that affect youth in detention or confinement. We believe these sound provisions are necessary steps to reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for juvenile offenders with mental health disorders.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families  
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Counseling Association  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
Anxiety Disorders Association of America  
Association for the Advancement of Psychology  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Child Welfare League of America  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Clinical Social Work Association  
Clinical Social Work Guild  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders  
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental  
Disability Directors  
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare  
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
National Disability Rights Network  
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA)  
Therapeutic Communities of America  
Tourette Syndrome Association  
United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

cc: Senate Judiciary Committee Members