

# Mental Health Liaison Group

July 20, 2004

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
The Honorable Susan Collins  
The Honorable John B. Breaux  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Clinton, Collins and Breaux:

The undersigned health and mental health organizations are writing to offer our support for the "Positive Aging Act of 2004," which you have reintroduced as S. 2572.

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, increased use of 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 die by 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 and effectively treat mental disorders is simply not reaching our front-line health care professionals.

Your bill is designed to make mental health services for older adults an integral part of primary care services in community settings and to extend them to other settings where seniors reside and receive services. The services under this legislation will be provided by interdisciplinary teams of mental health professionals working in collaboration with other providers of health and social services. Both the Administration on Aging and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration would be authorized to provide grants under this legislation.

Making mental health services an integral part of primary care services and 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 Counseling Association  
American Group Psychotherapy Association

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 Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Nurses Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychiatric Nurses 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  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Clinical Social Work Federation  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses  
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals  
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 Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare  
National Mental Health Association  
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA

# Mental Health Liaison Group

July 20, 2004

The Honorable Patrick J. Kennedy  
The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Kennedy and Ros-Lehtinen:

The undersigned health and mental health organizations are writing to offer our support for the "Positive Aging Act of 2004," which you have reintroduced as H.R. 4694.

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, increased use of 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 die by 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 and effectively treat mental disorders is simply not reaching our front-line health care professionals.

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