

Mental Health Liaison Group

August 16, 2002

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

Dear Representative Kennedy:

The undersigned national organizations are writing to express our support for legislation you are sponsoring, the Children's Mental Health Service Expansion Act, H.R. 5078. This important legislation will address the national shortage of children's mental health professionals, including school-based professionals, by encouraging more individuals to enter these critical fields.

The Surgeon General estimates that over 13.7 million children and adolescents are in need of treatment for emotional and behavioral disorders but less than 20% ever receive it. After the option of early intervention is lost, the possibilities for a lifetime cycle of difficulties from unresolved mental health issues looms ahead: school failure, substance abuse, job and relationship instability, and even the possibility of entering the criminal justice system.

One of the key barriers to treatment is the shortage of available specialists trained in the identification, diagnosis and treatment of children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders. Primary care providers report seeing a large number of children and youth with mental health problems, but have difficulty finding available clinicians to take referrals. The Surgeon General reported in 1999 that "there is a dearth of child psychiatrists, appropriately trained clinical child psychologists, or social workers." The shortage of children's mental health professionals has also been recognized by the Council on Graduate Medical Education and the state mental health commissioners.

Enactment of the Children's Mental Health Service Expansion Act will help remove one of the main barriers to treatment for children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders through the creation of educational incentives and federal support for children's mental health training programs. It will authorize scholarships, loan repayment programs, training grants, and specialty training program support. Children's mental health professionals covered under the bill include child and adolescent psychiatrists, child psychologists, school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors, psychiatric nurses, social workers, marriage and family therapists and professional counselors.

Thank you for your continued leadership on mental health issues. We look forward to working with you on this important bill.

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Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation
American Association of Children's Residential Centers
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Child Welfare League of America
Clinical Social Work Federation
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses.
MentalHealth AMERICA, Inc.
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
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 Psychiatric Health Systems
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 Mental Health Association
National Mental Health Awareness Campaign
National Network for Youth
School Social Work Association of America
Suicide Prevention Action Network
Treatment and Research Advancements Association for Personality Disorder
Tourette Syndrome Association

