

Mental Health Liaison Group

August 29, 2003

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Kennedy
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Bingaman and Representative Kennedy:

The undersigned national organizations are writing to express our support for legislation you are sponsoring, the Child Health Care Crisis Relief Act, S. 1223 and H.R. 1359. 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 Child Health Care Crisis Relief 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.

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

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

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work
American Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Managed Behavioral Healthcare Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Child & Adolescent Bipolar Foundation
Child Welfare League of America
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Law Center
Church Women United
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Federation of Behavioral, Psychological, & Cognitive Sciences
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
NAADAC The Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association for Children of Alcoholics
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning and Advisory Councils
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 Foundation for Depressive Illness
National Mental Health Association
North American Council on Adoptable Children
Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators' Association
Physicians for Human Rights
School Social Work Association of America
Society for Adolescent Medicine
Society for Research in Child Development
Tourette Syndrome Association
Volunteers of America