

Mental Health Liaison Group

August 30, 2007

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
528 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid:

The undersigned organizations are pleased to write in support of the legislation you recently introduced, S. 1854, the "Stop Senior Suicide Act." As a leader on the issue of suicide prevention, including spearheading a Senate-passed resolution in 1997, we appreciate your work on this bill which continues the efforts you've made on this important public health problem.

As you are aware, older Americans are disproportionately likely to die by suicide. In fact, of every 100,000 people ages 65 and older, 14.3 died by suicide in 2004. This figure is higher than the national average of 11.1 suicides per 100,000 people in the general population. In addition, non-Hispanic white men age 85 or older had an even higher rate, with 17.8 suicide deaths per 100,000. Suicide claimed the lives of 5,198 seniors over the age of 65 in 2004.

One of the leading causes of suicide among the elderly is depression. Research suggests that 75% of seniors who die by suicide have seen their primary care physician within the last month of their life.

MHLG supports the bill's four primary elements. A provision improves the geriatric mental health delivery system by requiring that the HHS Secretary form an Interagency Geriatric Mental Health Planning Council to make recommendations on the integration of mental health, suicide prevention, health and aging services. It establishes grants to be provided to public or private organizations in order to plan and implement elderly suicide early intervention and prevention strategies. It enhances the Suicide Prevention Resource Center so that it can provide guidance, training and technical assistance to grantees working on elderly suicide prevention. Finally, it improves Medicare coverage of mental health by adjusting the coinsurance percentage rate for outpatient mental health services so that it is equal to the rate for other outpatient services.

The MHLG appreciates your commitment to preventing suicide and looks forward to working with you to ensure that the "Stop Senior Suicide Act" is enacted.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Suicidology
American Association of Pastoral Counselors

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies (AJFCA)
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Clinical Social Work Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
The Jason Foundation, Inc
The Jed Foundation
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders – ANAD
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
Suicide Awareness Voices of Education
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA)
Therapeutic Communities of America
United Jewish Communities
United Neighborhood Centers of America
Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program