

Mental Health Liaison Group

September 6, 2007

The Honorable Charles B. Rangel
Chairman
Ways & Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Fortney Pete Stark
Chairman
Ways & Means Health Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jim McCrery
Ranking Member
Ways & Means Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dave Camp
Ranking Member
Ways & Means Health Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Gentlemen:

The undersigned organizations are writing to express our gratitude and support for mental health provisions in the House and Senate-passed bills that reauthorize and give needed improvements to the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

Among the many important provisions in the Senate and House bills (H.R. 976 and H.R. 3162 respectively) are those in both bills effectively eliminating the 75% actuarial-equivalent allowance for mental health services covered by benchmark-equivalent SCHIP plans, thereby requiring 100% actuarial equivalence.

The Senate bill goes further, however, by explicitly requiring in Section 607 that if a SCHIP plan provides both medical and surgical benefits and mental health or substance use disorder benefits, then that plan must "ensure that the financial requirements and treatment limitations applicable to such mental health or substance abuse benefits are no more restrictive than the financial requirements and treatment limitations applied to substantially all medical and surgical benefits covered by the plan."

This provision will improve mental health coverage for the more than 4.6 million children now enrolled in SCHIP programs that are operated outside of Medicaid. We ask you to include in the final bill the stronger language of Section 607, along with the approved language that would eliminate the 75% actuarial equivalent allowance.

We commend the House for having included in H.R. 3162, the CHAMP Act, a myriad of important provisions that benefit individuals with disabilities, including numerous improvements to Medicare mental health benefits. Despite the fact that effective treatments exist, Medicare's current mental health benefit is not meeting the treatment needs of the millions of beneficiaries suffering from mental and emotional disorders.

There are numerous shortcomings in current Medicare policy. Medicare beneficiaries must pay

50% of the cost of outpatient mental health treatment, compared to only 20% of the cost for other outpatient services. CHAMP repeals this discriminatory coinsurance in Section 203. A severe 2007 cut in outpatient mental health reimbursements is addressed by dollars restored in Section 610, which would help maintain the viability of the Medicare benefit. The impending 10% cut in reimbursement for all Part B providers is replaced in Section 301 by a half percentage increase. Medicare's coverage of mental health professionals is currently limited, reducing beneficiaries' choice of provider and access to care. The cadre of state-licensed providers is expanded in Section 607. The irrational coverage exclusion for benzodiazepine medications under Part D is removed, and statutory protection is provided to ensure that "all or substantially all" drugs are covered for other critical classes of mental health drugs – antipsychotics, antidepressants and anticonvulsants.

Enactment of these provisions in CHAMP would make a great difference in the lives of Medicare beneficiaries with mental disorders. Research has given us an unprecedented arsenal of effective treatments for mental and emotional disorders. Today, mental illnesses are as treatable as other general medical conditions. These treatments must be made available. Policymakers must take action to end the discriminatory policies in place -- in the Medicare program and elsewhere -- which work against individuals with these disorders.

We appreciate your interest in ensuring Americans have adequate access to effective mental health treatments, and we look forward to working with you to enacting the strongest legislation possible this month.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Nurses Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Bazon Center for Mental Health Law
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Child Welfare League of America
Clinical Social Work Association
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action

Families USA
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
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 and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Coalition of Mental Health Professionals and Consumers, Inc.
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA
Tourette Syndrome Association
United Neighborhood Centers of America
U.S. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

Mental Health Liaison Group

September 6, 2007

The Honorable John D. Dingell
Chairman
Energy & Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman
Energy & Commerce Health Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joe Barton
Ranking Member
Energy & Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nathan Deal
Ranking Member
Energy & Commerce Health Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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Suicide Prevention Action Network USA
Tourette Syndrome Association
United Neighborhood Centers of America
U.S. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

Mental Health Liaison Group

September 6, 2007

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman
Senate Finance Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Senate Finance Committee
Washington, DC 20510

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