

Mental Health Liaison Group

September 14, 2005

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Chairman, Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations
Subcommittee
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ralph Regula
Chairman, House Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations
Subcommittee
2358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Specter and Regula:

As the FY 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations bill (H.R. 3010) moves forward, the undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition representing the broad, diverse mental health community that serves men, women and children, and their families, urge you to “hold harmless” and to build upon last year’s funding for mental health services given the tremendous mental health needs in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

As Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt noted recently, it is critical that our nation address the mental health impact of this disaster. As we move to the next phase of rescue and recovery, it is paramount that we help children and families cope with the multiple losses of loved ones, jobs, homes, communities, schools, cherished belongings and economic resources.

The emotional and mental trauma associated with the grief, death, destruction, displacement, loss and terror experienced by millions of Americans is immense and has both immediate and longer-term mental health implications – for those with mental health disorders (or other chronic illnesses) pre-dating the hurricane; for thousands of other hurricane victims; and for first-responders and public service personnel.

Given research studies indicating that between 10 and 30 percent of people exposed to a disaster will develop PTSD, depending in part on its nature and severity, one must be prepared both for delayed onset of mental health symptoms and for many people developing chronic mental health problems if early, effective mental health services are not provided. Children are particularly vulnerable to chronic mental health problems as a result of trauma, so it is critical that we mount early-intervention and prevention efforts NOW.

We greatly appreciate that the Senate was able to go further than the encouraging work of the House in fully restoring funding for mental health services at the Center for Mental Health Services at SAMHSA and providing a welcome 3.7 percent increase for the National Institutes of Health, particularly the National Institutes of Mental Health, Drug Abuse, and Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse. Our coalition strongly urges you both to increase funding for mental health services beyond FY05 levels to avoid the very real dilemma of communities and states having to use existing mental health dollars to pay for emergency efforts, and to make mental health needs a priority in emergency supplemental appropriations.

As you recall, the President's Commission on Mental Health three years ago declared the public mental health "system" as "in shambles." The added strain related to Katrina, not only in the Gulf region but in many parts of the country that are housing displaced victims or otherwise providing emergency support, will only exacerbate an overburdened mental health system that currently does not serve more than 67 percent of adults and nearly 80 percent of youth who need mental health services.

In this time of crisis, we urge you to answer the clarion call of President Bush's Mental Health Commission to **make mental health a national priority** by increasing funding for mental health services, supports and research.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

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 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 Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children & Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Clinical Social Work Guild 49
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health And Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning and Advisory Councils
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Disability Rights Network (formerly NAPAS)
National Mental Health Association
Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA)
Therapeutic Communities of America
Tourette Syndrome Association

cc: The Honorable Tom Harkin, Ranking Member, Senate Labor, Health and Human
Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittee
The Honorable David Obey, Ranking Member, House Labor, Health and Human
Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittee