

Mental Health Liaison Group

September 22, 2004

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Christopher S. Bond
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Mikulski and Bond:

The undersigned organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group are pleased to support your legislation, the **“Ronald Reagan Alzheimer’s Breakthrough Act of 2004”** (S. 2533), which will serve as a tribute to former President Ronald Reagan and his family’s ten-year struggle with Alzheimer’s disease. The bill will strengthen the federal commitment to Alzheimer’s research, provide support for family caregivers, and create a public education campaign to inform the public about prevention and treatment techniques that can help to maintain mental health as people age.

We are especially supportive of the provisions that will provide critical financial, emotional and social support not only to family caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer’s, but also to those caring for family members across the lifespan. Family caregivers currently provide about \$250 billion in continuous unpaid care to their loved ones, including young and adult children, spouses and aging family members with varying mental and/or physical disabilities and chronic health conditions. A significant majority of these family caregivers has reduced or left employment to provide care, enduring great financial hardship. Many also experience serious physical problems and emotional stress as a result of their caregiving responsibilities.

We also support the significant increase in authorization for the National Family Caregiver Support Program that provides critical information and support to family caregivers of the aging population. We are especially pleased that the legislation includes the full text of the Senate-passed bill, the “Lifespan Respite Care Act” (S. 538). Respite care has been shown to reduce stress associated with caregiving, improve the health and well-being of the caregiver, and even reduce the need for more costly out-of-home placements and nursing home care. Despite the high level of need, respite care is in critically short supply, inaccessible to many families due to restrictive eligibility criteria, or seen as an unaffordable “luxury” when other more immediate expenses are pressing.

In addition, the tax provisions included in the bill would help alleviate some of the financial burden by providing relief for extraordinary expenses that other families may not incur, such as specialized child care, adult day care, prescription drugs and medical bills, specialized care or therapy.

In closing, we would like to thank you once again for your efforts in developing the Ronald Reagan Alzheimer's Breakthrough Act of 2004 and to offer our assistance in achieving passage of this vital legislation.

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 Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Clinical Social Work Federation
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders – ANAD
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
Therapeutic Communities of America

Mental Health Liaison Group

September 22, 2004

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Christopher Smith
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Markey and Smith:

The undersigned organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group are pleased to support your legislation, the **“Ronald Reagan Alzheimer’s Breakthrough Act of 2004”** (H.R. 4595), which will serve as a tribute to former President Ronald Reagan and his family’s ten-year struggle with Alzheimer’s disease. The bill will strengthen the federal commitment to Alzheimer’s research, provide support for family caregivers, and create a public education campaign to inform the public about prevention and treatment techniques that can help to maintain mental health as people age.

We are especially supportive of the provisions that will provide critical financial, emotional and social support not only to family caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer’s, but also to those caring for family members across the lifespan. Family caregivers currently provide about \$250 billion in continuous unpaid care to their loved ones, including young and adult children, spouses and aging family members with varying mental and/or physical disabilities and chronic health conditions. A significant majority of these family caregivers has reduced or left employment to provide care, enduring great financial hardship. Many also experience serious physical problems and emotional stress as a result of their caregiving responsibilities.

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