

Mental Health Liaison Group

September 26, 2003

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

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

Dear Chairmen Specter and Regula:

As you resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of the FY 2004 Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill (H.R. 2660/S. 1356), 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 maintain the highest-passed funding increases for mental health programs.

Since the House's passage of H.R. 2660, the long-awaited report from the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health was released. The Commission found America's mental health system to be "in shambles," resulting in millions of people with mental illnesses not receiving the care they need. The report calls for transforming fragmented public mental health services into a system focused on early intervention and recovery. Such a system would provide people with critical mental health needs, the treatment and supports necessary to live, work, learn and participate fully in their communities.

By building on the higher funding levels of H.R. 2660 and S. 1356 for mental health programs, the transformation of the mental health system can begin in earnest. We urge you to build on the overall House-passed funding increase (\$7 million over FY03) for the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), including \$9.5 million for the Children's Mental Health Services Program and \$7 million for the PATH (homelessness) program. At the same time, the Senate would provide a larger increase than the House bill for the Mental Health Block Grant, the Protection and Advocacy program and Programs of Regional and National Significance – including restoration of the Consumer Technical Assistance Centers – at CMHS. Lastly, we urge you to maintain the higher Senate funding levels for the National Institutes of Health. Our coalition strongly supported the doubling of NIH from 1998 to 2003. We believe it is critically important for Congress to continue increasing our nation's investment in mental illness research so that new opportunities for scientific discovery are realized.

The President's Commission highlights a set of recommendations that demonstrates that people with— or at risk of— mental health disorders need access to a range of advanced treatments, early interventions and supports that are both culturally appropriate and consumer- and family-centered. The cost of not providing meaningful increases would be devastating for an already burdened mental health system. An astounding 80 percent of children entering the juvenile justice system have mental disorders, and yet an alarmingly high number of juvenile detention facilities are not equipped to treat them. It is important to note that more than 67 percent of adults and nearly 80 percent of children who need mental health services do **not** receive treatment. And, mental illness plays a significant role in the over 650,000 attempted suicides each year.

Now, more than ever, we need your continued support and commitment to improve the availability, accessibility, and quality of services for individuals with mental illness through increased federal investment in federal mental health programs. Given the erosion of this nation's public health safety net and the fact that states are facing the worst fiscal crisis since World War II, we urge you to increase funding for key mental health programs.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association of Children's Residential Centers
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 Nurses Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Child Welfare League of America
Children & Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Clinical Social Work Federation
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (formerly National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association)
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
International Assoc. of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services (IAPSRs)
International Society of Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD)
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning and Advisory Councils (NAMHPAC)
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems
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 Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Mental Health Association
Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN)
Tourette Syndrome Association

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