

Mental Health Liaison Group

November 5, 2003

The Honorable Susan Collins
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jim Ramstad
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Collins and Representative Ramstad:

The undersigned organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group – a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, families, advocates, professionals and providers dedicated to expanding the availability of mental health services and improving mental health care in America – are pleased to support the Keeping Families Together Act (S. 1704/H.R. 3243).

As you well know, thousands of families across the country too often are forced to choose between keeping their child and obtaining access to the healthcare and services he or she so desperately needs. Intensive services to treat mental health problems are very costly and often not covered by private insurance. In many instances, these families are not eligible for Medicaid because of income. This leaves parents unable to afford the specialized care for their children. As a result, families are often forced to give up custody of their child to state agencies in order to secure treatment. Custody relinquishment of a child solely to access necessary mental health services and supports is a horrific national problem that is directly related to the lack of access to appropriate mental health services for children in both the private and public sectors. As a result, family support and the chances of recovery are severely hampered.

This important legislation responds to the growing crisis in children's mental health by addressing a fragmented service system. The Keeping Families Together Act will provide grants to states to establish interagency systems of care for children and adolescents with serious mental and emotional disorders. It will also eliminate barriers to community-based care for children with serious mental and emotional disorders by enabling a greater number of children to receive mental health services under the Section 1915(c) Medicaid home- and community-based waiver. This waiver service will help families obtain treatment for their child while avoiding out-of-home placement. Additionally, this legislation will establish a federal interagency task force to examine mental health issues in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

With studies showing that approximately two-thirds of children and adolescents are not getting the mental health services they need, we welcome this bicameral and bipartisan legislation. Once again, we commend you for your ongoing leadership on children's mental health policy. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to enact this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Chris Koyanagi, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, 1101 15th Street, NW, Suite 1212, Washington, DC 20005

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 Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
American Society of Clinical Psychopharmacology
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Child Welfare League of America
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Federation of Behavioral, Psychological and Cognitive Sciences
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning and Advisory Councils
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
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 Foundation for Depressive Illness
National Mental Health Association
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA
Tourette Syndrome Association, Inc.