

Mental Health Liaison Group

November 8, 2004

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 you resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of the FY 2005 Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill (H.R. 5006/S. 2810), 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, recognize the arduous task ahead of you in completing this bill, yet we respectfully urge you to maintain the highest-approved funding increases for mental health programs.

Overall, the MHLG supports the Senate bill because S. 2810 would provide more funding for mental health programs at SAMHSA and NIH than the House bill. In particular, the Senate would provide \$935 million for the Center for Mental Health Services at SAMHSA, versus \$891 million in the House bill, and a 4 percent increase for NIH, including the National Institutes of Mental Health, Drug Abuse, and Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse, versus a 2.7 percent increase contained in the House bill. While only the Senate bill would fund the newly proposed State Incentive Grants (SIG) at the Administration's request, both the House and Senate bills would restore proposed funding cuts to the elderly and jail diversion programs and support the preservation of proposed funding increases in children's mental health, homelessness and mental health block grant programs.

Therefore, the MHLG supports the following proposed Senate funding levels:

- \$44 million (or the Administration's request) for a key initiative in the President's mental health budget, the proposed new State Incentive Grants (SIG) for comprehensive state mental health planning, which aims to advance the goals of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health.
- \$10 million for services in permanent supportive housing targeted to individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness.
- 4 percent increase for the NIH, including the National Institutes of Mental Health (to \$1,437 million), Drug Abuse (to \$1,026 million), and Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse (to \$445 million).

At the same time, the MHLG supports the following proposed House funding level:

- \$1.4 million increase over last year for the Protection and Advocacy program (to \$36 million).

And, the MHLG supports the following jointly proposed Senate and House funding levels:

- \$5.5 million increase (or the Administration's request) over last year for the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) program (to \$55.3 million).

- \$3.6 million increase (or the Administration's request) over last year for the Children's Mental Health Services program (to \$106 million).
- \$1.4 million (or the Administration's request) over last year for the Mental Health Block Grant (to \$436.1 million).
- \$5 million total for programs targeted to Older Adults and \$7 million total for Jail Diversion, restoring proposed cuts to both of these programs.
- \$2 million total (or the Administration's request) for the Consumer Technical Assistance Centers.

By building on the higher funding levels for the mental health programs outlined above, the transformation of the mental health system can begin in earnest. As you recall, President Bush's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, the first such commission in over 25 years, found that **our nation's failure to make mental health a priority is a national tragedy**. The report calls for transforming our fragmented public mental health services into a system focused on early intervention and recovery. In order for transformation to truly take place, we must invest in communities all across the nation, from Pennsylvania to Nevada and from Iowa to Louisiana, that are grappling with the crisis of unmet mental health needs

As an illustration of the overwhelming need for mental health services, nearly 2,000 youth are incarcerated *every day* simply because community mental health services are unavailable, according to a recent House Government Affairs report. The lack of community services comes at a great cost. Juvenile detention facilities spend an estimated \$100 million each year to house youth who are simply waiting for community mental health services. Therefore, an investment in providing mental health services in the community is both cost-effective and helps to limit the interaction of young people with juvenile justice/corrections system.

In order to meet the tremendous challenges that mental illness poses as the *leading* cause of disability and premature mortality in the United States, including more than 67 percent of adults and nearly 80 percent of children who need mental health services that do **not** receive treatment, we urge you to protect and build on the funding increases for key mental health programs. The cost of not providing meaningful increases would be devastating for an already burdened mental health system.

In addition to the need for funding increases for existing mental health programs at SAMHSA and NIH, we urge your special attention to the funding needs of several programs initiated over the last year that will advance the goals of the President's Commission. Furthermore, MHLG urges your support for the following new programs in the FY 2005 appropriations cycle: \$15 million for the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act; and \$50 million for the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act – also communicated to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees by the Campaign for Mental Health Reform, which was launched in the wake of the release of the Commission's final report.

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 of Children's Residential Centers (AACRC)
 American Association of Pastoral Counselors
 American Association of Practicing Psychiatrists
 American Counseling Association
 American Group Psychotherapy Association
 American Mental Health Counselors Association

American Occupational Therapy Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
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)
Child Welfare League of America
Clinical Social Work Federation
Clinical Social Work Guild 49
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
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 Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Mental Health Association
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA)
Tourette Syndrome Association
Volunteers of America

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