

Mental Health Liaison Group

February 6, 2003

The Honorable Ted Stevens
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
S-128 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Young
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
H-218 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Stevens and Young:

As you finalize consideration of the FY 2003 Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill, 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 enact the higher funding levels for mental health programs allocated in the current House and Senate appropriations bills.**

In its recent Interim Report, the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health found that our nation's failure to prioritize mental health is a national tragedy. One measure of the scope of that tragedy is the over 30,000 lives lost annually to suicide – a loss, the Commission states, that is largely preventable. We urge you to begin to address the national mental health-funding crisis by providing increases for mental health programs in the Omnibus Appropriations bill.

The Commission's Chairman, Michael Hogan, stated "The good news is that recovery from mental illness is a reality; a range of safe and effective treatments, services and supports exist for men, women and children with mental illness. Yet, half of all people who need treatment for mental illness do not receive it. The rate is even lower for racial and ethnic minorities and the quality of care they receive is poorer." At a time when state budgets are in the worst crisis since World War II, only the federal commitment to these programs will stop the closures of mental health service facilities, and ensure that recovery is a reality.

Consequently, Congress should focus on funding community-based services, like those identified as model programs in the Commission's report, and ensure that the federal Center for Mental Health Services at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has a budget sufficient to put proven prevention and treatment programs in place in *every* community across the country.

We urge you to reject calls for a long-term Continuing Resolution for programs in the Labor, HHS appropriations bill. That strategy would shortchange programs at SAMHSA and NIH (indeed, across the U.S. Public Health Service) impeding the planning and efficient delivery of a

host of critical health and preventive health services, and research. More than ever, we need your continued support and commitment to improve the availability, accessibility, and quality of services for individuals with mental disorders through increased federal investment in federal mental health programs. **Please work together to maintain the higher Senate funding levels (prior to across-the-board cuts) for SAMHSA and NIH, and the House proposed allocation for substance abuse prevention and the mental health block grant.**

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 (AAGP)
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation
American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC)
American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work
American Counseling Association
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychological Association
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare (AABH)
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children & Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Clinical Social Work Federation
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
International Assoc. of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services (IAPSRs)
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 of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems (NAPAS)
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
National Network for Youth
Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN)

cc: The Honorable Robert Byrd, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable David Obey, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Arlen Specter, Chairman, Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and
Education Appropriations Subcommittee
The Honorable Ralph Regula, Chairman, House Labor, Health and Human Services, and
Education Appropriations Subcommittee
The Honorable Tom Harkin, Ranking Member, Senate Labor, Health and Human
Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee