

Mental Health Liaison Group

April 3, 2001

John Bridgeland
Deputy Assistant to the President
for Domestic Policy
The White House
2nd Floor, West Wing
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Bridgeland:

The Mental Health Liaison Group, a coalition of 50 national organizations concerned about mental health policy and representing consumers, families, advocates and mental health providers and professionals, wishes to express our appreciation to the President for his proposal to establish a National Mental Health Commission as outlined in the New Freedom Initiative. This is an extremely important concept that has our full support.

In proposing the Commission, the President cited the confusion among federal agencies that deal with mental health issues. This fragmentation has resulted in multiple federal programs using different definitions of mental illness or childhood emotional disorders. In addition, federal programs often create overlaps and gaps in services that can be reimbursed under federal programs and unnecessary duplication of standards and regulation. A review of this situation and recommendations for greater streamlining of federal rules would be of great benefit to the field.

The Commission, as outlined, will address the exciting promise of new scientific advances in treatment and services for adults with serious mental illness and children with serious emotional disorders. A recent scientific review of the literature on treatment effectiveness, published as the first Surgeon General's report on mental health, clearly demonstrates how little is implemented from what is determined by research to be effective. As result, many people languish without appropriate services and supports. Consequences of this situation include homelessness, arrest and incarceration in criminal and juvenile justice facilities, the inability to work, children dropping out of school, increases in the rolls for various disability and social welfare programs and other tragic, expensive and poor outcomes.

Once the Commission is organized, we hope it will examine opportunities for more cost-effective and productive partnerships between federal programs and state investments

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
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in mental health services for adults and children. A focus on promoting recovery, removing barriers to work and participation in school, and ensuring access to effective mental health interventions would greatly improve the lives of those disabled by serious mental and emotional disorders. This effort is particularly timely in light of the recent Supreme Court decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, also a major proposal of the New Freedom Initiative.

The Mental Health Liaison Group, whose 50 members are listed in the enclosure, is pleased to support the President's proposal to create a National Mental Health Commission as described in the New Freedom initiative. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the design of the Commission and its important work. As cochairs of the MHLG Health Policy Committee, we would be happy to arrange such a meeting. Please contact one or other of us if you feel such a meeting would be helpful at this stage.

We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Chris Koyanagi
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