

Mental Health Liaison Group

May 6, 1998

Honorable Thomas A. Daschle
Senate Minority Leader
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Daschle:

As members of Mental Health Liaison Group -- a coalition composed of family, consumer and provider organizations -- we are writing to express our endorsement of the "Patients' Bill of Rights Act of 1998" (S. 1890/H.R. 3605).

This measure provides essential protections for consumers in the private health insurance marketplace, building on reforms in Medicare and Medicaid and on recommendations by Members of Congress and the President's Commission on Consumer Protection & Quality in the Health Care Industry. For example, the legislation requires the development of quality criteria along with performance and clinical outcome measures for at-risk individuals and people with chronic and severe illnesses. If S. 1890 is passed, this provision will have an important positive impact on the health care provided to adults with severe mental illnesses, children with serious emotional disturbances and other people with significant mental disorders who are increasingly being served in managed care settings.

The bill reforms the utilization review process to require the use of trained personnel, assures fair appeals, guarantees access to emergency and urgent care services and holds health plans accountable for their decisions. In addition, where medically necessary, S. 1890 permits consumers to go outside of a closed drug formulary to access critically needed medications.

Given the history of insurance discrimination against people with mental disorders and the serious problems associated with the delivery of mental health care by HMOs, the "Patients' Bill of Rights Act" represents a critical step forward.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation
American Association of Children's Residential Centers
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association of Private Practice Psychiatrists
American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work

American Counseling Association
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Nurses Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association of Behavioral Healthcare Management
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorders
Child Welfare League of America
Clinical Social Work Federation
Corporation for the Advancement of Psychiatry
Family Service America
International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Homes and Services for Children
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems
National Association of Psychiatric Treatment Centers for Children
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

National Mental Health Association

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Peter Newbould, American Psychological Association, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002
