

February 9, 2011

The Honorable Grace Napolitano
U.S. House of Representatives
1610 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Napolitano:

The undersigned organizations applaud your re-introduction of the Mental Health in Schools Act of 2011 and pledge our strong support to enact this initiative. We share your vision for expanding the availability of comprehensive school-based mental health services for students in communities across America. Undoubtedly, healthier students learn and perform better and a key component of academic success is addressing the mental health of our nation's children and adolescents.

According to a 2009 Institute of Medicine report on mental health prevention and promotion, 50 percent of individuals with a mental health diagnosis first experience it by age 14, 75 percent by age of 24. Given the early onset of emotional and behavioral disorders and their subsequent indirect and direct costs (estimated at \$247 billion annually), investments in early intervention programs, especially those that better connect behavioral health and education systems, should be prioritized.

This legislation is needed to break the cycle of failure that is a result of ignored mental health problems. This important legislation builds on the highly-effective program known as the Safe Schools/Healthy Students program, it authorizes competitive grants to local school districts to assist them in early interventions and referrals for treatment, it provides supports for students and their families, and it allows for staff training to be culturally and linguistically appropriate.

The Mental Health in Schools Act will work to greatly improve the success of children with mental health issues in our school systems by endorsing Positive Behavioral Supports (PBS). School-wide PBS has emerged as a successful strategy to prevent school violence, the use of alcohol and drugs, possession of firearms and general disruptive behavior. The literature summarizing studies of school-wide PBS suggests that, on average, PBS schools see improvements in social climate and academic performance and experience 20- to 60-percent reductions in disciplinary incidents. Furthermore, the improved behavior enables teachers to use more classroom time for education.

We commend you for re-introducing the Mental Health in Schools Act. Your bill recognizes that mental disorders are prevalent among our nation's youth and the introduction of your bill is an important step in addressing our nation's mental health crisis among youth. The Act would also provide communities with much needed assistance in developing policies to address child and adolescent mental health issues and violence when and if it occurs. The effect of the Act will be to create a much more positive environment for children with mental health issues in our local communities. We strongly urge the House to pass this legislation as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Counseling Association
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association on Health and Disability
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention/SPAN USA
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Music Therapy Association
American Nurses Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association (Ortho)
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
American School Counselor Association
American Society for Adolescent Psychiatry
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare (AABH)
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Child Welfare League of America
Children & Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Child Welfare League of America
Clinical Social Work Association
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies
Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Pupil Services Administrators (NAPSA)
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

National Disability Rights Network
National Latino Behavioral Health Association (NLBHA)
National PTA
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America
School Social Work Association of America
Therapeutic Communities of America
Tourette Syndrome Association, Inc.
US Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association