

Mental Health Liaison Group

February 26, 2010

The Honorable
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator :

The undersigned organizations, representing disability and mental health advocates, consumers, and professionals, are writing to respectfully urge you to support bringing S. 678, the *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2009*, to the Senate floor for consideration and to vote for final passage. This critical legislation, which was reported favorably by the Judiciary Committee in the 110th and 111th Congresses, makes significant strides toward meeting the needs of the overwhelming number of youth in the juvenile justice system who have mental health and substance abuse needs.

Research shows that between 60 and 80 percent of youth involved with the juvenile justice system meet the criteria for at least one mental health or substance use disorder and that, of this group, approximately 80% meet the criteria for two or more mental health or substance use disorders. These alarming numbers represent a serious strain on juvenile justice agencies, which face critical challenges in meeting these needs, resulting from insufficient resources, administrative capacity, staffing, and staff training. Though juvenile justice agencies never were intended to serve as the main point of access for mental health and substance abuse services for youth, they must partner with other child serving agencies to transform mental health care for children and adolescents.

S. 678 represents a starting point in transforming a system that simply houses far too many young people with behavioral problems to one that begins to address their complex health issues, by:

- Directing states to outline in their State Plans their efforts to use evidence-based mental health and substance abuse screening and assessment programs for youth in secure facilities;
- Providing states with training and technical assistance related to effective mental health and substance abuse screening, assessment, and treatment;
- Engaging a much-needed study to fill in significant gaps in the research regarding the prevalence of disabilities among the juvenile justice population; and
- Creating a new incentive grant program to help State and local governments address mental health and substance abuse needs among juvenile justice-involved youth by: fostering linkages between juvenile justice and public mental health agencies; promoting the use of evidence-based prevention, identification and intervention strategies; providing staff training; and supporting at-risk youth.

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If you have any questions, please contact Micah Haskell-Hoehl of the American Psychological Association at mhaskell-hoehl@apa.org or at 202.336.5935. We look forward to continuing to work with you to further address these critical issues and strengthen protections for those in the criminal and juvenile justice systems with needs related to mental health and substance abuse.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Counseling Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention/SPAN USA
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses 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
Center for Clinical Social Work
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Child Welfare League of America
Clinical Social Work Association
Corporation for Supportive Housing
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Emergency Nurses Association
First Focus
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Behavioral Health
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Coalition of Mental Health Professionals and Consumers, Inc.
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Foundation for Mental Health
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America *
School Social Work Association of America
Therapeutic Communities of America
US Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

* not an MHLG member