

Mental Health Liaison Group

June 19, 2009

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
113 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Stabenow:

The undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group are writing to express our strong support for the Mental Illness Chronic Care Improvement Act, S. 1136. Furthermore, we urge the Congress to include this important measure in any health care reform legislation that is enacted this year.

People with serious mental disorders treated in state mental health systems – a total exceeding three million persons – are confronting an emerging public health crisis. According to a recent study financed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), individuals with conditions like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major clinical depression served by public mental health agencies **on average die 25 years sooner than other Americans**. The same SAMHSA survey of eight states explains these shocking mortality data by documenting a sky high incidence of co-occurring chronic diseases among this low income disability population including cancer, diabetes, asthma, heart diseases and cardio-pulmonary conditions of all kinds. At the same time, clients of public mental health service agencies have little or no access to specialty medical services or even basic primary health care.

The Mental Illness Chronic Care Improvement Act represents the first large scale effort at the federal level to directly alleviate this crisis. By co-locating primary care capacity in Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) and other front line community-based mental health and substance abuse providers, the MICCI Act finances an integrated care model that facilitates access to needed medical services. We are also excited about the prevention and wellness activities in the legislation leading to better management of chronic conditions like hypertension, diabetes and diseases linked to smoking.

Senator Stabenow, thank you for your extraordinary leadership. The mental health community stands united and ready to assist you in enacting this critically important measure.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers

American Psychotherapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare si
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Clinical Social Work/ABE
Child Welfare League of America
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Counties
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of Rural Mental Health
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Foundation for Mental Health
SPAN USA, a Division of AFSP
United Jewish Communities
Witness Justice