

# Mental Health Liaison Group

November 18, 1997

The President  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) -- which is composed of consumer, provider, family and volunteer organizations -- are writing to express our support for the consumer protections now pending before the Advisory Commission on Consumer Protections and Quality in the Health Care Industry. In general, these procedural safeguards represent a substantial step forward and should enhance the quality of health care for millions of Americans.

We are particularly pleased that the Commission endorsed a right to choice among health care providers, thereby giving consumers the ultimate power of determining the quality of health plans by voting with their feet. In additions, your recommendations regarding information disclosure and access to emergency medical services are clearly superior to existing industry practices -- and are of great significance to children and adults with mental disorders. Perhaps most importantly, the Commission is about to propose that every consumer served by managed care organizations (MCOs) be given the right to external review of clinical decisions made by MCOs involving the denial of medically necessary services, or the unjustified reduction of ongoing mental health care.

Of course, MHLG members were disappointed that the Commission omitted certain key safeguards; the loss of a common-sense requirement that health plans pay for the routine medical care of consumers participating in clinical trials was dismaying. Moreover, the Commission's decision to omit any mention of mental health parity is baffling -- particularly in light of the study reported in the current issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association indicating that nondiscriminatory mental health care, **“will increase insurance payments only by about \$1 per enrollee per year”** (emphasis added).

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers  
c/o Al Guida, National Mental Health Association, 1021 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

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However, on balance, the Commission's recommendations (if translated into legally enforceable standards) will certainly improve the quality of American health care, and these procedural safeguards certainly merit your full support.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association for Marriage & Family Therapy  
American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation  
American Association of Private Practice Psychiatrists  
American Counseling Association  
American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees  
American Occupational Therapy 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  
Child Welfare League of America  
Clinical Social Work Federation  
Corporation for the Advancement of Psychiatry  
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill  
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