March 5, 2001

The Honorable Charles Grassley
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Edward Kennedy
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Grassley and Kennedy:

The undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG)—a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, families, advocates, professionals and providers dedicated to expanding the availability of mental health services and improving mental health care in America—are pleased to support the re-introduction of the Family Opportunity Act.

The hallmark of the Family Opportunity Act of 2001 (S. 321) is the removal of a barrier that so many families encounter when they earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, are without employer health coverage or their private insurance coverage has inadequate mental health benefits that prevents them from meeting their child’s needs. This important legislation serves as a link to the comprehensive benefit of services the Medicaid program provides and will promote early intervention, ensure access to all medically necessary services and help restore family security.

Increasing access to needed health and mental health care is a longstanding priority of the MHLG. Therefore, we commend your bipartisan leadership and the sound approach your proposal takes in fostering access to a wide range of services and supports for children with significant health needs.

Too often we find that the service needs of families with children with serious mental disorders are not being met and obtaining adequate mental health coverage in private insurance plans is extremely difficult. The Center for Mental Health Services has estimated that two-thirds of all young people are not getting the mental health treatment they need. In some tragic cases, families are forced to give up custody of a child with complex health care needs to the state as an avenue to access mental health and support services for the child.

The MHLG looks forward to working closely with you and your staff throughout the legislative process to pass the Family Opportunity Act of 2001 this year. Thank you for your commitment to the health needs of our most vulnerable children.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Neurology
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association of Children's Residential Centers

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Chris Koyanagi, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, 1101 15th Street, NW, Suite 1212, Washington, DC 20005
American Counseling Association
American Family Foundation
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
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
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Child Welfare League of America
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Federation
Federation of Behavioral, Psychological & Cognitive Sciences
Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health
International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of Psychiatric Treatment Centers for Children
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Mental Health Association
Tourette Syndrome Association
Mental Health Liaison Group

March 5, 2001

The Honorable Pete Sessions
The Honorable Henry Waxman
United States House of Representatives
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Sessions and Waxman:

The undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG)—a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, families, advocates, professionals and providers dedicated to expanding the availability of mental health services and improving mental health care in America—are pleased to support the re-introduction of the Family Opportunity Act.

The hallmark of the Family Opportunity Act of 2001 (H.R. 600) is the removal of a barrier that so many families encounter when they earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, are without employer health coverage or their private insurance coverage has inadequate mental health benefits that prevents them from meeting their child’s needs. This important legislation serves as a link to the comprehensive benefit of services the Medicaid program provides and will promote early intervention, ensure access to all medically necessary services and help restore family security.

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