

Mental Health Liaison Group

September 23, 1998

The Honorable Trent Lott
Senate Majority Leader
S-230 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Lott:

The undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) are writing to urge the Senate to pass meaningful legislation protecting consumers now enrolled in managed care before the end of the 105th Congress. If Senate passage is accomplished in an expeditious manner, ample time remains to initiate a conference committee with the House and achieve final passage of this important legislation.

Our community has a large stake in timely consideration of consumer protection legislation. Today, over 160 million Americans receive their mental health care from a mere handful of managed care plans. Virtually every organization signing onto this correspondence has received reports of:

- ⊘ Consumers being denied access to emergency services despite being in psychiatric crisis.
- ⊘ Health care plans applying rigid utilization review criteria that radically reduce the availability of outpatient mental health services.
- ⊘ Treatment plans, diagnoses and related clinical decisions being reviewed by health plan personnel with no prior medical or mental health training whatsoever.
- ⊘ HMO drug formularies insisting upon the lowest-cost psychotropic medications, which may be clinically inappropriate for individuals with more serious mental disorders.

Procedural disputes should not inhibit free and fair debate of consumer protection legislation on the floor. Key issues like access to specialists, medical necessity, point of service, legal accountability and related matters should now be considered by the full Senate. The starting point for debate could involve any of the wide array of comprehensive bills now pending, including the measures endorsed by the House and Senate Republican leadership.

In our view, at this time, the only bill that represents meaningful reform is S. 1890, the Patients' Bill of Rights introduced by Senator Daschle.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation
American Association of Children's Residential Centers
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association of Private Practice Psychiatrists
American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work
American Counseling Association
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Family Foundation
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Orthopsychiatric 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
Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder
Clinical Social Work Federation
Corporation for the Advancement of Psychiatry
International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association for Rural Mental Health
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