

# Mental Health Liaison Group

October 29, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman, Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations  
Subcommittee  
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Obey  
Chairman, House Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations  
Subcommittee  
2358 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Harkin and Obey,

The undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition representing the broad, diverse mental health community serving adults and children with mental illness, and their families, strongly urge you to generate a conference report of the FY 2010 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bills that includes the higher House-passed funding levels for mental health services, supports and research. The higher funding levels provided in the House bill are essential in meeting the extraordinary mental health needs of communities throughout the nation – especially strained as a result of this difficult economic crisis.

The MHLG applauds your leadership in building upon the Administration's proposed increases to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the National Institutes of Health. Through your efforts, both the House and Senate FY 2010 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bills provide funding increases for crucial areas, including services and research for children's mental health, suicide prevention, integration of primary care and mental health services, mental health prevention and promotion (where the Senate number is higher for LAUNCH), protection and advocacy, PTSD, safe schools-healthy students, and supports to curb chronic homelessness.

At the same time, in this time of crisis, we urge you to make funding increases for overlooked mental health programs a priority in order to provide increases for the mental health block grant and consumer-centered programs, among others, whose funding levels have remained stagnant for nearly a decade. We are pursuing a comprehensive approach – a broad array of services and supports – in addressing the needs of communities because of the grand scope of the economic crisis and the potential for every family member to be affected as a result, as well as the likelihood that every state will cut precious services. And mental health services and supports are particularly vulnerable given the persistent trend of chronic underfunding and the lack of recovery dollars dedicated to SAMHSA.

An October 6<sup>th</sup> national survey shows that the economic downturn is taking a toll on the mental health of Americans. Individuals who are unemployed are four times as likely as those with jobs to report symptoms consistent with severe mental illness. Americans who experienced involuntary changes in their employment status, such as pay cuts or reduced hours, also are twice as likely to have these symptoms, even though they are employed full time. And the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) claims that “calls into suicide crisis centers have substantially increased during the past year.”

This population is already vulnerable, much more so given the current economic crisis. For example, a 2006 report indicated that persons with serious mental illness die, on average, 25 years earlier than the general population, and we know that the suicide rate of approximately 33,000 persons a year is nearly twice the number of homicides per year – all before the crisis.

An investment of this scale is needed to meet the extraordinary mental health needs of communities throughout the nation as a result of this difficult economic crisis.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists  
American Counseling Association  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychological Association  
Anxiety Disorders Association of America  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Center for Clinical Social Work/ABE  
Child Welfare League of America  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)  
Clinical Social Work Association  
Clinical Social Work Guild OPEIU 49  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)  
Emergency Nurses Association  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association for Children’s Behavioral Health  
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD)  
National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations  
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

National Disability Rights Network  
National Foundation for Mental Health  
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA  
US Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association (USPRA)

cc: The Honorable Thad Cochran, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee and  
Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittee  
The Honorable Todd Tiahrt, Ranking Member, House Labor, Health and Human Services  
and Education Appropriations Subcommittee  
The Honorable Daniel Inouye, Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee  
The Honorable Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee