

June 5, 2013

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Minority Leader McConnell,

We are writing on behalf of a collection of national advocacy organizations concerned about the well-being of children and youth in the United States to articulate our support for the Mental Health Awareness and Improvement Act (S. 689), and to ask for a final Senate floor vote to be scheduled for this legislation so it can progress to the House.

While the well-being of all individuals in the United States is important to our organizations, we are particularly concerned with the unmet needs of children and youth affected by mental illness. Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and three quarters by age 24, yet only 20 percent of children with identified mental illness receive treatment.

The Mental Health Awareness and Improvement Act addresses many of these unmet needs by containing several provisions that reauthorize already existing federal programs, as well as supports new efforts to develop programs and provide services through schools, college campuses, hospitals, and other community environments.

For example, it amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by allowing use of grant funds under section 4121 for school-based mental health partnerships, as well as promoting the creation of prevention efforts such as positive behavioral interventions, identifying students in need of such services, and linking them to the appropriate ones. It also requires a U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on the utilization of mental health services for children, as well as reauthorizes the National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative (NCTSI) so that the current national network of child trauma centers can continue to operate and collect, analyze, and report data to inform evidence-based treatments and services.

Several of our organizations also signed on to the May 3rd letter of support sent by the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition of more than 70 organizations representing families, providers and patients/consumers. This letter supports the efforts of the MHLG with a focus on highlighting and expressing support for the provisions specific to children and youth.

We are grateful for the leadership of Senator Harkin and Senator Alexander in the drafting of this legislation and we welcome the opportunity to work with you on the passage of S. 689 as well as other proposals to improve the well-being of our nation's children.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Children & Youth (Maryland)
Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association on Health and Disability
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Nurses Association
American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children
American Psychiatric Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families (Arkansas)
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Public Policy Priorities (Texas)
Child and Family Policy Center (Iowa)
Child Neurology Society
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Home Society of America
Eating Disorders Coalition
First Focus Campaign for Children
Foster Family Treatment Association
Futures without Violence
Healthy Teen Network
Hillsides (California)
Kentucky Youth Advocates (Kentucky)
Lutheran Services in America
Maine Children's Alliance (Maine)
Mental Health America
Michigan's Children (Michigan)

National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Assembly on School-Based Health Care
National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACoA)
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Children's Alliance
National Disability Rights Network
National Network for Youth
Nebraska Families Collaborative (Nebraska)
New England Consortium Regional Poverty Initiative
New Mexico Voices for Children (New Mexico)
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (Pennsylvania)
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT (Rhode Island)
SC Appleseed Legal Justice Center (South Carolina)
School Social Work Association of America
The Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
The Jewish Federations of North America
The National African American Drug Policy Coalition, Inc.
The National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
The Trevor Project
Voices for Utah Children (Utah)
Voices for America's Children
Voices for Virginia's Children (Virginia)
WI Council on Children and Families (Wisconsin)