

# Mental Health Liaison Group

June 14, 2006

The Honorable Michael B. Enzi, Chairman  
The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy, Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Enzi and Senator Kennedy:

The undersigned health and mental health organizations are writing to urge you to support the inclusion of vital mental health provisions of the Positive Aging Act (S. 1116) in the bill to reauthorize the Older Americans Act.

An estimated 20% of older adults in the U.S. experience a mental health problem that is not a normal part of aging. The most common mental health disorders among older adults are anxiety, depression, and cognitive impairment. These disorders can have a significant impact on both physical and mental health, often leading to increased illness, disability, and mortality. In fact, older adults currently have the highest rates of suicide of any age group in the U.S., and depression is its foremost risk factor. Research indicates that up to 75% of older adults who die by suicide have visited a primary care physician within a month of taking their own life. Knowledge about how to diagnose and effectively treat mental disorders is simply not reaching our front-line health care professionals.

These missed opportunities to diagnose and treat mental health disorders are taking a significant toll on older adults and increasing the burden on families, caregivers, and our health care system. In order to ensure that our seniors do not continue to fall through the cracks, we urge you to include vital mental health provisions of the Positive Aging Act in the bill to reauthorize the Older Americans Act.

The Positive Aging Act amendments to the Older Americans Act would take important steps toward addressing the mental health needs of older Americans by designating an Office of Older Adult Mental Health Services in the Administration on Aging, which would provide grants to states for the development and operation of systems for providing mental health screening and treatment services to older individuals who lack access to such services.

We urge you to make mental health screening and treatment services available and accessible to older Americans by including this vital mental health language in the bill to reauthorize the Older Americans Act.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families  
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers  
c/o Peter Newbould, American Psychological Association Practice Organization, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002

American Association of Pastoral Counselors  
American Counseling Association  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Nurses Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychiatric Nurses Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Psychotherapy Association  
Anxiety Disorders Association of America  
Association for the Advancement of Psychology  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Clinical Social Work Association  
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders -- ANAD  
National Association of Mental Health Planning and Advisory Councils  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Coalition of Mental Health Professionals and Consumers, Inc.  
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare  
National Mental Health Association  
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA  
Tourette Syndrome Association  
United Jewish Communities