

Mental Health Liaison Group

June 14, 2006

The Honorable Mike DeWine, Chairman
The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Retirement Security and Aging
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman DeWine and Senator Mikulski:

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

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 for Marriage and Family Therapy
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