

February 6, 2009

Senator Richard Durbin
U.S. Senate
309 Hart Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Durbin:

The purpose of our writing today is two-fold. We would first like to introduce ourselves to you and second, we would like to express our strong support for legislation that you will be introducing shortly.

The Higher Education Mental Health Alliance (HEMHA) is a newly established partnership of nine organizations* whose mission is to advance college mental health. HEMHA affirms that the issue of college mental health is central to student success, and therefore is the responsibility of higher education. HEMHA seeks to play a role in mental health advocacy, policy, practice, and research as it relates to institutions of higher education. HEMHA's work is undertaken with attention to the entire mental health continuum including education, prevention, intervention, treatment, and aftercare.

As one of our first actions, we are pleased to express our full support for the "Mental Health on Campus Improvement Act." Your legislation addresses the critical needs that exist on campuses of all kinds today by creating a grant program that allows funds to be used to provide direct mental and behavioral health services to students, provide outreach services, educate families and the campus community about mental health issues, employ appropriately trained staff, expand mental health training opportunities, develop and support best-practices, and evaluate these practices. In addition, the "Mental Health on Campus Improvement Act" establishes an important national public education campaign as well as an Interagency Working Group on College Mental Health.

The mental health needs of this population are real and well documented – and the stakes are high. According to the 2008 National Survey of College Counseling Center Directors, 95% responded that the past trend of seeing a greater number of students with severe psychological problems on campus continues and 64.2% of center directors noted that shortages remain during peak times. The International Association of Counseling Services' recommended counselor to student ratio is 1:1,000 or 1,500, however the average reported by counseling center directors was 1:1,906. This average is up from 2006 when it was 1:1,698. Research has found that mental health problems have an impact on many aspects of education, including academic performance, retention, and graduation rates. Over 40% of students participating in the Fall 2007 American College Health Association - National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA) reported feeling so depressed that

* See Attachment

An Inter-association Partnership to Advance College Mental Health

American College Counseling
Association (ACCA)

American College Health
Association (ACHA)

American College Personnel
Association (ACPA)

American Psychiatric
Association (APA)

American Psychiatric Nurses
Association (APNA)

American Psychological
Association (APA)

Association for University
and College Counseling
Center Directors (AUCCCD)

Jed Foundation (JED)

National Association
of Student Personnel
Administrators (NASPA)

it was difficult to function at least one time in the last 12 months. In addition, 10.3% seriously considered suicide at least one time in the last 12 months. But with support from our campus' counseling centers, there are positive effects on students' personal well-being, academic success, and retention.

Thank you for your leadership in addressing the mental and behavioral health needs of young people throughout the nation. HEMHA looks forward to serving as a resource to you and your staff in the days ahead in pushing for the passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely (on behalf of all HEMHA member organizations),

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley K. Sacher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lesley Sacher, MHA, FACHE, FACHA
HEMHA 2009 Leader

References:

Gallagher, R.P. (2008) The National Survey of College Counseling Center Directors. The International Association of Counseling Services, Inc.: Alexandria, VA.
Monograph Series Number 8Q.

Link to the 2008 National Survey of College Counseling Center Directors:
<http://www.iacsinc.org/2008%20National%20Survey%20of%20Counseling%20Center%20Directors.pdf>

Link to the ACHA-NCHA Fall 2007 Reference Group Executive Summary:
http://www.acha-ncha.org/docs/ACHA-NCHA_Reference_Group_ExecutiveSummary_Fall2007.pdf



Higher Education Mental Health Alliance

Total Representation by HEMHA Membership Organizations

Acronym	Member Organization	Members
ACCA	American College Counseling Association	1,700
ACHA	American College Health Association	3,000
ACPA	American College Personnel Association	9,000
APA	American Psychiatric Association	38,000
APA	American Psychological Association	148,000
APNA	American Psychiatric Nurses Association	6,000
AUCCCD	Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors	700
JED	The Jed Foundation	Not a membership based organization
NASPA	National Association of Student Personnel Administrators	11,000
	Total HEMHA Member Strength	217,400