

January 30, 2009

The Honorable Judd Gregg
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Gregg:

On behalf of the 148,000 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), I write today to ask for your consideration of a small but important request during your continued negotiations on H.R. 1, the *American Recovery and Investment Act of 2009* and S. 1, the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*.

Both pieces of legislation recognize the critical importance of investing in the public health needs of our nation. During this time of economic crisis, it is especially important that we invest in our primary care and public health workforce – including both medical and behavioral/mental health providers. An investment today in the training of the diverse health professions required for a safe, efficient, and effective health care system will begin to rebuild our public health system and expand our population's access to primary care. The inclusion of psychologists addresses the behavioral and psychosocial components of both physical and mental disorders that are fundamental to an integrated health care system.

APA is requesting that you include the attached conference report language as part of the final bill package to ensure that psychologists and their academic and training centers will continue to participate in programs supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration.

As of September 30, 2008, there were 3,059 Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) with 77 million people living in them. It would take 5,145 practitioners to respond to the need for mental health services if based on a population to practitioner ratio of 10,000:1, and that does not include the behavioral aspects of health that are important to recovery from and prevention of illness. Community health centers report that most of the health problems they address are chronic illnesses and/or mental disorders, for both of which psychologists are distinctively trained to help prevent and treat effectively. And yet there are currently only 370 psychologists working in Mental Health HPSAs

through the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program. According to multiple reports from the Institute of Medicine (IOM), new models of practice for health care include the integration of psychosocial and behavioral assessment and interventions. Although biological interventions (e.g., medications and immunizations) are often considered the hallmark of medical practice, the role of behavior and psychosocial components has received increasing attention. Approximately half of U.S. mortality is linked to behavior. Behavioral health care, of which psychologists are experts, has a critical role to play in both treating many chronic illnesses, including cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and serious mental disorders, as well as in health prevention and promotion initiatives that seek to change behavior to address problems of smoking or substance abuse, for example.

We are grateful for the extraordinary effort you and your staff have made to address our nation's economic needs through the stimulus legislation. We urge you to add report language to ensure that psychologists are available to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of our nation's underserved populations. APA stands ready to assist you and your staff with addressing the mental and behavioral health needs of our country.

Sincerely,

Norman B. Anderson, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer

Attachment

Proposed Report Language:

Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund
Public Health Workforce

Psychologists play a critical role in addressing behavioral and mental health problems as part of the nation's primary health care team. With rapidly increasing rates of posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, substance abuse, and other mental and behavioral disorders related to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and the economic downturn, the need for health care services is expected to rise for decades. The Committee fully intends that psychologists or graduate programs and schools that train psychologists continue to participate in programs funded in this Act and administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration for health professions loan repayment, scholarships and equipment, including the National Health Service Corps.