

# MENTAL HEALTH LIAISON GROUP

May 3, 2013

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-221 Capitol Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-230 Capitol Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20510

## **RE: Mental Health Community Supports Harkin/Alexander Bill [S. 689]**

Dear Leader Reid and Senator McConnell,

The 40 undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group [MHLG] – a coalition of more than seventy (70) organizations representing families, providers and patients/consumers – are writing to express our support for the Mental Health Awareness and Improvement Act [S. 689]. After the overwhelming bipartisan vote 95-2 – in favor of S. 689, we urge you to schedule a final Senate floor vote in order to send this important legislation to the House.

S. 689 takes significant steps toward improving school-based mental health care in the United States while renewing critical programs under the jurisdiction of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). With respect to school-based services, the measure by Senators Harkin and Alexander bolsters positive behavioral interventions and supports in school systems with the goal of improving the learning environment and enhancing academic achievement while fostering evidence-based approaches to disciplinary issues. S. 689 also incorporates legislation introduced by Senator Franken and Representative Napolitano that seeks to create partnerships between community-based behavioral health providers and local schools to improve school-based mental health care for children.

Among the important SAMHSA initiatives included for reauthorization is the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act – introduced this Congress by Senators Reed and Murkowski – one of the foundational programs underpinning our national suicide prevention strategy. The legislation also reauthorizes the National Child Traumatic Stress Network [NCTSN], introduced earlier this year by Senator Murray, which addresses childhood trauma in environments as varied as gun violence and natural disasters.

S. 689 incorporates early detection by advancing legislative initiatives put forth by Senators Begich, Klobachar, Ayotte and Collins. These initiatives promote early detection of widely prevalent mental disorders by key segments of the community

including, teachers, police officers, fire fighters, and staffers of college/university counseling centers. Finally, Harkin/Alexander makes significant improvements to our nation's awareness and understanding of treatment approaches to opioid use disorders, among other provisions.

We urge you to move expeditiously with final Senate floor action on this important measure. And we commend Senators Harkin and Alexander for their leadership in moving this critical bill unanimously out of committee for passage on the Senate floor.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association of Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association of Health and Disability  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association of Pastoral Counselors  
American Counseling Association  
American Dance Therapy Association  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Hospital Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Orthopsychiatric Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychiatric Nurses Association  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
CHADD, Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder  
Clinical Social Work Association  
Clinical Social Work Guild 49  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition  
First Focus Campaign for Children  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
NAMI, National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems  
National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery  
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare

National Disability Rights Network  
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America  
School Social Work Association of America  
SPAN USA  
The Trevor Project  
Tourette's Syndrome Association, Inc.