

Mental Health Liaison Group

November 15, 2004

The Honorable Judd Gregg
United States Senate
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-2903

Dear Chairman Gregg,

We are writing to urge your support for an appropriation for the “Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act” (S. 1194) in the Commerce, Justice, State, and the Judiciary Appropriations bill. S. 1194 was enacted by Congress earlier this year and signed into law recently by President Bush.

The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that 16% of those incarcerated in U.S. jails and prisons, more than 300,000 inmates, suffer from serious mental illnesses. The prevalence of youth with mental disorders in juvenile justice facilities is even higher. Many of these individuals are not violent criminals, but rather low level offenders whose involvement with criminal justice systems can be directly attributed to lack of appropriate mental health treatment and services. Federal, state and local correctional systems expend a disproportionate amount of time and resources responding to these individuals. Simply stated, these facilities are not designed or intended to be front-line psychiatric treatment facilities, but that is what they have become.

S. 1194 authorizes \$50,000,000 for FY 2005 and “such sums as may be necessary” for fiscal years 2006 through 2009. Money from this program can be used for a variety of purposes, including jail diversion, mental health and substance abuse treatment for individuals with mental illnesses who are incarcerated, community re-entry services, cross-training of criminal justice, law enforcement and mental health personnel, and expansion of mental health courts. S. 1194 received unanimous, bipartisan support in both the Senate and the House, as well as from leaders in law enforcement, corrections, and the courts.

We greatly appreciate your inclusion of \$1 million for mental health courts in the Senate Report 108-344. However, we urge you to recognize as well the need for Congressional support for the broader range of services authorized in this new legislation, services which have been proven effective in reducing recidivism and involvement with criminal justice systems. Providing funding for S. 1194 in FY 2005 would be a significant step forward in alleviating the growing burden on law enforcement and corrections for providing mental health care.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent request. Please contact Ron Honberg, 703-516-7972, at NAMI with any questions.

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
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Child Welfare League of America
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Mental Health Association