

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 19, 2008

The Honorable Alan Mollohan
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Room H-309, The Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Mollohan and Ranking Member Frelinghuysen:

We write to express our strong support for continued funding of the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act in FY 2009. This measure, which received \$5 million in fiscal years 2006 and 2007 and \$6.5 million for FY 2008, provides states and local governments with resources to design and implement initiatives for people with mental illness in the criminal justice system, which increases public safety, reduces state and local spending, and improves the lives of people with mental illness.

This important program was signed into law by President Bush in 2004 and authorizes a \$50 million grant program to be administered by the United States Department of Justice (DOJ). The bill passed with unanimous, bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress, and is supported by a broad spectrum of leaders representing the diverse fields of law enforcement, corrections, the courts, and mental health.

State and local governments can use the grants for a broad range of activities, including mental health courts, mental health and substance abuse treatment for incarcerated mentally ill offenders, community re-entry services, and cross-training of criminal justice, law enforcement, and mental health personnel. The grants also promote improved training of local law enforcement to help them identify and improve their response to people with mental illness.

According to a study by the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics, 16% of those incarcerated in U.S. jails and prisons – more than 300,000 – suffer from mental disorders. The DOJ also estimates that the prevalence of youth with mental disorders in our juvenile justice facilities is even higher. Most of these individuals are not violent criminals, but rather low-level offenders. Incarceration is the most costly way to deal with a non-violent offender with a mental disorder. The Mentally Ill Offender program provides assistance to states and communities to mount new programs or expand existing programs that can both reduce costs and help these offenders return to productive lives.

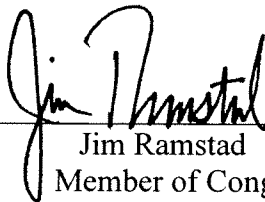
The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health concluded that offenders with mental disorders frequently do not receive appropriate mental health care when they are put in jail, nor when they re-enter the community following their discharge. As a result, the Commission found that these individuals quickly return to the justice system. The Mentally Ill

Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction program is an important step at addressing mentally ill offenders in a collaborative, common sense manner.


The grants available through the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction act are already in high demand. Of the 250 grant applications submitted in 2006, only 11% were funded due to the availability of funds, awarding only 28 communities in 19 states with additional resources to design and implement or improve upon their mental health programs. In 2007, only an additional 27 communities in 16 states received grant awards. And, during these two years, of the forty-three states that have applied for funding, programs in only 26 states and the District of Columbia received grant awards.

We are requesting that funding be provided in the FY 2009 appropriations bill for this important program. By doing so, we will help law enforcement and corrections officials whose jails, prisons, and juvenile holding facilities have become our country's largest mental health institutions.


Sincerely yours,



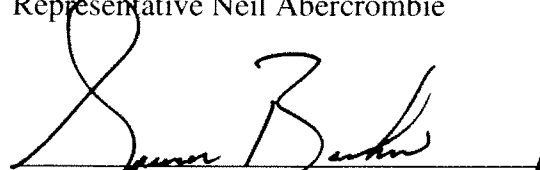
Jim Ramstad
Member of Congress

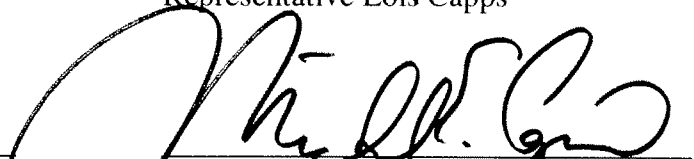


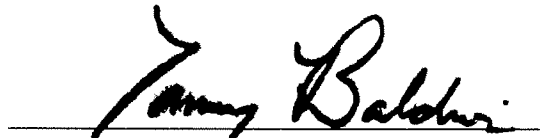
William Delahunt
Member of Congress

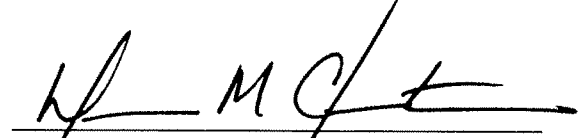

Representative Neil Abercrombie

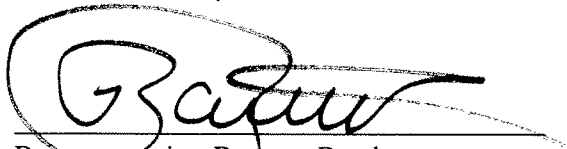

Representative Lois Capps



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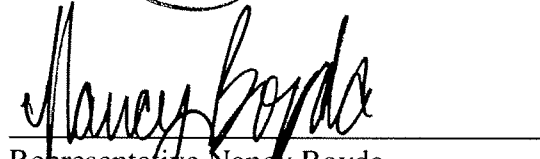

Representative Michael E. Capuano

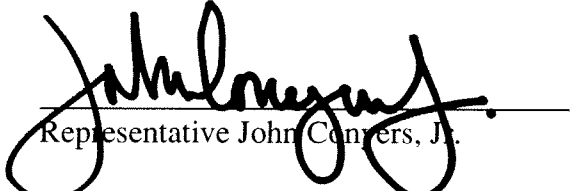

Representative Tammy Baldwin


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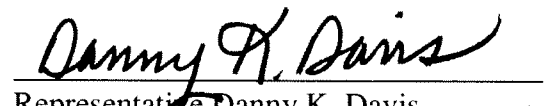

Representative Roscoe Bartlett

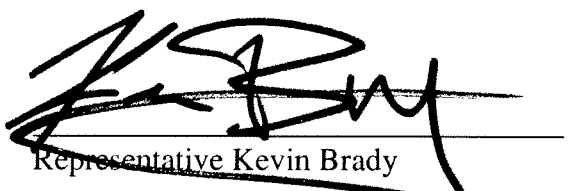

Representative Steve Cohen



Representative Nancy Boyda


Representative John Conyers, Jr.

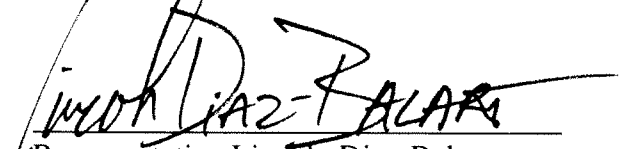

Representative Howard Berman

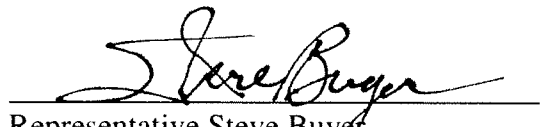

Representative Danny K. Davis

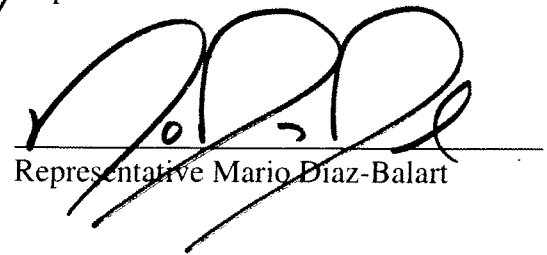

Representative Kevin Brady


Representative Diana DeGette


Representative Corrine Brown

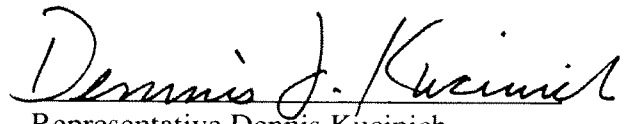

Representative Lincoln Diaz-Balart


Representative Steve Buyer


Representative Mario Diaz-Balart



Representative Keith Ellison



Representative Dennis Kucinich



Representative Phil English



Representative James R. Langevin



Representative Gene Green



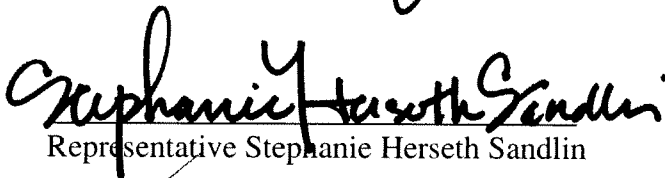
Representative Steven C. LaTourette



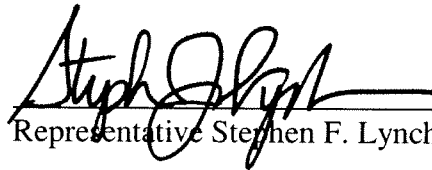
Representative Raul M. Grijalva



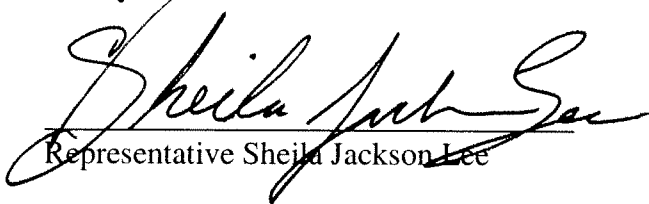
Representative Dave Loebsack



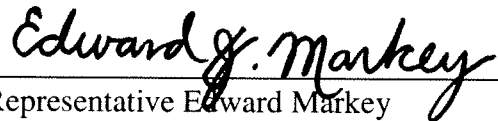
Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin



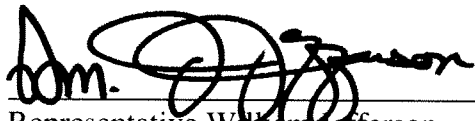
Representative Stephen F. Lynch




Representative Sheila Jackson Lee



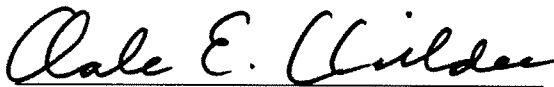
Representative Edward Markey



Representative William Jefferson



Representative Carolyn McCarthy



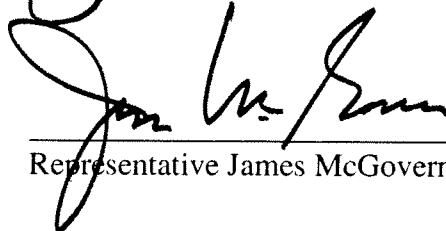
Representative Dale E. Kildee



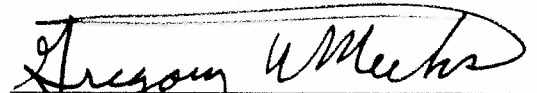
Representative Jim McDermott





Representative Ron Kind



Representative James McGovern



Representative Gregory Meeks


Representative Bill Pascrell, Jr.


Representative John L. Mica


Representative Todd R. Platts

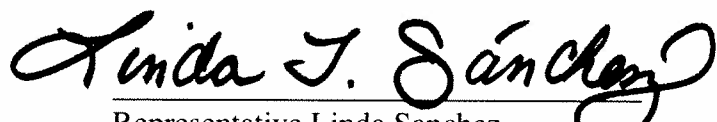

Representative Michael E. Michaud


Representative Ileana Ros Lehtinen


Representative Brad Miller


Representative Mike Ross


Representative James P. Moran

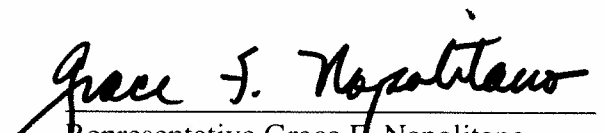

Representative Linda Sanchez



Representative Tim Murphy


Representative Jan Schakowsky


Representative Sue Myrick

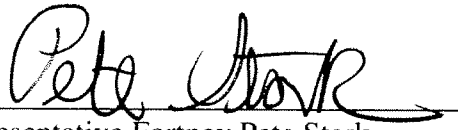

Representative Robert C. "Bobby" Scott


Representative Grace F. Napolitano


Representative Lamar Smith


Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton

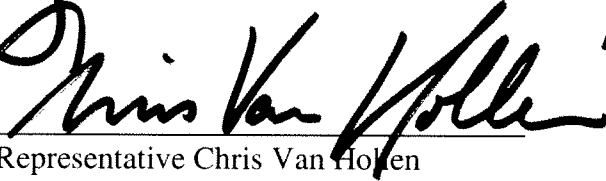

Representative Hilda Solis



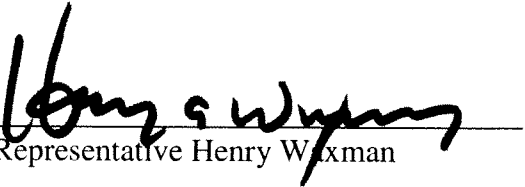
Representative Fortney Pete Stark



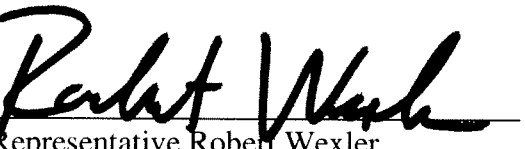
Representative John F. Tierney



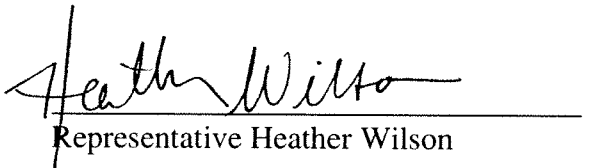
Representative Chris Van Hollen



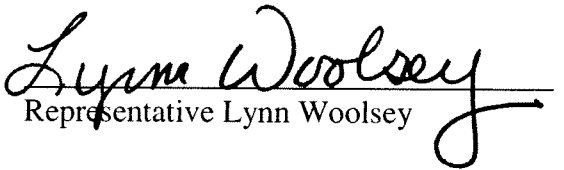
Representative Henry Waxman



Representative Robert Wexler



Representative Heather Wilson



Representative Lynn Woolsey