

THE BAZELON CENTER WANTS YOU... TO ASK CANDIDATES FOR CONGRESS ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AGENDAS!



Last year, the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health called for transforming the delivery of mental health care in America. It envisions a future where mental illnesses are detected early and where everyone in need has access to effective treatment and supports. For this to occur, states and localities will need help from Congress and the federal government to reform their public mental health systems. Below are some questions to ask your state's candidates for the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, to help you decide if they will support the Commission's goal and the civil rights and human dignity of people with mental disabilities.

1. The New Freedom Commission finds it "imperative that our Nation adopt a comprehensive, systematic approach to improving the mental health status of children." Schools can play a vital role in such a strategy. **What would you do to strengthen mental health programs in schools to improve early intervention and provide services that encourage youth with serious mental disorders to stay in school and graduate?**

2. Medicaid is the single most important funding source for public mental health services. **What would you do to strengthen Medicaid to ensure that it continues to support critical services for low-income people?**

3. Medicaid law requires that all Medicaid-covered children have access to all medically necessary services to treat their physical or mental health condition. This is known as the EPSDT mandate (Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment). **Would you propose any changes in the federal EPSDT mandate for children on Medicaid?**

4. Large numbers of people with mental disorders are incarcerated in jail, prison or juvenile detention as a result of overstretched and underfunded mental health systems. **What would you do to address this "criminalization" of people with mental disorders?**

5. Studies by the General Accounting Office and Congressional oversight committees show that thousands of families are forced to give up custody of their children to child welfare or juvenile justice agencies solely to obtain mental health services for them. **What would you do to create a more humane and rational way for these children to access care?**

6. People with serious mental illnesses have extremely high unemployment rates, even though most report they want and are able to work. Federal law created disincentives to work because benefits (such as income support, housing and food stamps) are discontinued once earnings accrue. **What would you do to deal with interagency problems of work disincentives for people with disabilities?**

7. Adults with serious mental illnesses often lack housing, and many are homeless. **What policies would you promote to expand the availability of low-income housing, particularly housing targeted to individuals with disabilities?**

8. According to the U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health and the New Freedom Commission, people of color receive fewer and poorer quality mental health services. **What would you do to ensure that members of minority populations have equal access to mental health services?**

9. Many fiscal difficulties in the public system would be eased if more Americans had coverage for mental health care. **How would you expand access to public and private health insurance and how would you integrate mental health services into your proposals?**

10. Given the findings of both the U.S. Surgeon General and the New Freedom Commission that many Americans lack access to the range of highly effective treatments for mental disorders, particularly those who rely upon state and local mental health systems, **what would you do to address this gap between what we know and what we do?**

AND A QUESTION FOR SENATE CANDIDATES...

The battle over judicial nominations for the federal court has become an extremely important concern for people with disabilities. Many of the President's nominees have a record of hostility toward individual enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act and other civil rights laws. **What would you do to ensure that the nominees who are confirmed by the Senate are judges who respect Congress' authority to pass civil rights laws and to make them enforceable by individuals against states and other entities?**