

February 6, 2013

The Honorable Al Franken
U.S. Senate
309 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Grace Napolitano
U.S. House of Representatives
1610 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Franken and Representative Napolitano:

On behalf of the millions of Americans living with mental health and substance use conditions, their families and communities, the undersigned organizations commend you for introducing the Mental Health in Schools Act of 2013 (S. 195) and we pledge our strong support to enact this initiative. We believe that the Mental Health in Schools Act is an effective approach to furthering healthy youth development and school success and in preventing avoidable and harmful outcomes that may occur when mental health needs are left unaddressed.

We believe that the Mental Health in Schools Act is a critical component in addressing youth violence. We share your vision for expanding the availability of comprehensive school-based mental health services for students in communities across America. Undoubtedly, healthier and safer students learn and perform better and a key component of academic success is addressing the mental health of our nation's children and adolescents.

According to a 2009 Institute of Medicine report on mental health prevention and promotion, 50 percent of individuals with a mental health diagnosis first experience it by age 14, 75 percent by age of 24, but do not seek treatment, on average, until the age of 24. Given the early onset of emotional and behavioral disorders and their subsequent indirect and direct costs (estimated at \$247 billion annually), investments in early intervention programs, especially those that better connect behavioral health and education systems, should be prioritized.

This legislation is needed to break the cycle of failure that is a result of ignored mental health problems. This important legislation builds on the highly-effective program known as the Safe Schools/Healthy Students program, it authorizes competitive grants to local school districts to assist them in early interventions and referrals for treatment, it provides supports for students and their families, and it allows for staff training to be culturally and linguistically appropriate.

We applaud you for introducing the Mental Health in Schools Act. Your bill recognizes that mental disorders are prevalent among our nation's youth and the introduction of your bill is an important step in addressing our nation's mental health crisis among youth. S. 195 and the House companion bill (as yet unnumbered) would also provide communities with much needed assistance in developing policies to address child and adolescent mental health issues and violence when and if it occurs. The effect of the Act will be to create a much more positive and

safer environment for children with mental health and addiction challenges in our local communities. We strongly urge the Senate and House to pass this legislation as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry (AAGP)
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association on Health and Disability
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention/SPAN USA
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Clinical Social Work Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD)
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
US Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association