

# Mental Health Liaison Group

April 28, 2015

The Honorable Kelly Ayotte  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lynn Jenkins  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Doris Matsui  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senators Ayotte and Blumenthal and Representatives Jenkins and Matsui:

The undersigned national mental health and substance use disorder organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group are writing today to thank you for your leadership in authoring the Mental Health First Aid Act of 2015 (S. 711/H.R. 1877). This bill is critical to raising awareness of and increasing public education on mental illness and addiction disorders.

As organizations whose mission is to advocate for improved services for Americans living with mental illness and addictions, we have long recognized the stigma associated with behavioral health disorders. Each year, more than 1 in 5 Americans experiences a mental health or substance use disorder, according to data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Yet, U.S. society remains largely ignorant about the signs and symptoms of mental illness, ignoring our role as supportive community members to help people experiencing these illnesses.

Far too often, this lack of knowledge – along with the stigma attached to seeking help – prevents people who need treatment from accessing the care they need in a timely fashion. While many Americans know how to administer first aid and seek medical help should they come across a person having a heart attack, few are trained to provide similar help to someone experiencing a mental health or substance abuse crisis.

The Mental Health First Aid Act authorizes \$20 million in grants to fund Mental Health First Aid training programs around the country. Participants would be trained in recognizing the symptoms of common mental illnesses and addiction disorders; de-escalating crisis situations safely; and initiating timely referral to mental health and substance abuse resources available in the community. This legislation will provide critical public education that ultimately will help decrease stigma and increase access to care. Along with other important public education programs, such as Crisis Intervention Team programs for first responders (CIT), Mental Health First Aid is a crucial tool in helping Americans identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers  
c/o Laurel Stine, J.D., American Psychological Association at [lstine@apa.org](mailto:lstine@apa.org)  
and Debbie Plotnick, MSS, MLSP, Mental Health America at [dplotnick@mentalhealthamerica.net](mailto:dplotnick@mentalhealthamerica.net)

Every day, we see the effects of our decades-long neglect of Americans' substance abuse and mental healthcare needs. Thank you for your leadership in sparking investments in mental health that will help all Americans live longer, more fulfilling lives.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Art Therapy Association  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association on Health and Disability\*  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association of Pastoral Counselors  
American Counseling Association  
American Dance Therapy Association  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Orthopsychiatric Association  
American Psychological Association  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Clinical Social Work Guild  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
Mental Health America  
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals  
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)  
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders  
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils  
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of State Mental Health Directors (NASMHPD)  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education  
National Council for Behavioral Health  
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
National League for Nursing  
School Social Work Association of America  
Treatment Communities of America  
The Trevor Project