

May 12, 2009

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Herbert H. Kohl
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Leahy, Specter, Durbin, and Kohl:

The undersigned organizations, representing disability and mental health advocates, consumers, and professionals, are writing in support of the *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Reauthorization Act of 2009*, S. 678. This critical legislation makes significant strides toward meeting the needs of the overwhelming number of youth in the juvenile justice system who have mental health and substance abuse needs.

Research shows that between 60 and 80 percent of youth involved with the juvenile justice system meet the criteria for at least one psychiatric diagnosis and that, of this group, approximately 80% meet the criteria for two or more mental health or substance abuse disorders. These alarming numbers represent a serious strain on juvenile justice agencies, which face critical challenges in meeting these needs, resulting from insufficient resources, administrative capacity, staffing, and staff training. Though juvenile justice agencies never were intended to serve as the main point of access for mental health and substance abuse services for youth, they must partner with other child serving agencies to transform mental health care for children and adolescents.

S. 678 represents a starting point in transforming a system that simply houses far too many young people with behavioral problems to one that begins to address their complex health issues, by:

- Directing states to outline in their State Plans their efforts to use evidence-based mental health and substance abuse screening and assessment programs for youth in secure facilities;
- Providing states with training and technical assistance related to effective mental health and substance abuse screening, assessment, and treatment;
- Engaging a much-needed study to fill in significant gaps in the research regarding the prevalence of disabilities among the juvenile justice population; and
- Creating a new incentive grant program to help State and local governments address mental health and substance abuse needs among juvenile justice-involved youth by: fostering linkages between juvenile justice and public mental health agencies; promoting the use of evidence-based prevention, identification and intervention strategies; providing staff training; and supporting at-risk youth.

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Thank you for your strong leadership on juvenile justice issues and for the consideration given to mental health and substance abuse issues within the reauthorization of the *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act*. If you have any questions, please contact Micah Haskell-Hoehl of the American Psychological Association at mhaskell-hoehl@apa.org or at 202.336.5935. We look forward to continuing to work with you to further address these critical issues and strengthen protections for those in the criminal and juvenile justice systems with needs related to mental health and substance abuse.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Counseling Association
American Foundation for the Blind
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Humane Society
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
APSE
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
CHADD, Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Child Welfare League of America
Correctional Education Association
The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)
Easter Seals
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, & Action
Mental Health America
NAMI, National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of Pupil Services Administrators
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Education Association
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
School Social Work Association of America
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA)
TCA, Therapeutic Communities of America
Tourette Syndrome Association
United Church of Christ/Justice and Witness Ministries
United Spinal Association
US Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association (USPRA)