January 25, 2013

President Barack Obama

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20501

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the millions of Americans living with mental and substance use disorders, their families and communities, the undersigned mental health organizations want to thank you, Vice President Biden and his task force highlighting the importance of mental health as part of your efforts to respond to the Newtown tragedy and recent events.

The Mental Health Liaison Group is a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, parents and family members, advocates, providers, and mental health experts dedicated to building better lives for millions of Americans affected by mental illness. We look forward to working with you and your administration in reducing violence and accessing effective mental health care through these recommendations.

1. **Improve prevention, early identification, and intervention in mental health care.** It is well-documented that prevention programs, social support and timely mental health treatment can promote well-being and prevent crises. Too often, what in hindsight are clear signs of the need for mental health care and supportive services are not identified until after a crisis occurs.

1. **Provide education and training to school personnel, law enforcement, families, primary care physicians, and members of the community to educate them about how to identify and respond compassionately to youth and adults experiencing health crisis and recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illnesses.**Too often those in a position to help do not know what to do when a child or adult experiences a crisis or manifests the early signs and symptoms of mental illness.

1. **Support outreach programs including those delivered by peers, that engage and support people with mental illness, help them access care and services, and support their recovery.**

1. **Implement school-based mental health services and supports.**We are clearly not addressing the needs of students struggling with mental health conditions in many of our nation’s schools.

1. **Increase the qualified mental health workforce.**Throughout the nation, there are critical shortages in the availability of qualified mental health professionals. In many communities, children and adults are placed on long waiting lists to access mental health services.

1. **Fully implement key provisions of the *Affordable Care Act (ACA)*including mental health and addictions parity requirements.**We are grateful for your leadership on health care and urge continued leadership in ensuring full and effective implementation of the ACA.
2. **Protect federal funding of Medicaid.**Youth and adults with mental illnesses are among the largest, most important class of Medicaid beneficiaries. Forty-eight percent of all public mental health services in America are funded through Medicaid. Reductions in federal funding of Medicaid would have a devastating impact on people with mental illnesses.

1. **Protect federal funding for mental health supports and services.**We encourage the Administration to protect and increase funding for mental health supports and services in FY2014.

Mr. President, MHLG thanks you for your leadership and stands ready to work with you and the Administration on the goal of improving mental health care in America. We invite you to contact our work group co-chairs, Nancy Trenti at 202/222-5530 Ron Honberg at 703/516-7972, for comments or with questions.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Association of Pastoral Counselors

American Association on Health and Disability

American Counseling Association

American Dance Therapy Association

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Mental Health Counselors Association

American Orthopsychiatric Association

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychiatric Nurses Association

American Psychoanalytic Association

American Psychotherapy Association

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Center for Clinical Social Work

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Clinical Social Work Association

Clinical Social Work Guild 49

Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Eating Disorders Coalition

Mental Health America

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

National Association for Children’s Behavioral Health

National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors

National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems

National Association of School Psychologists

National Association of Social Workers

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

National Council for Behavioral Health

National Disability Rights Network

National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health

National Rural Mental Health Association

Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America

School Social Work Association of America

The Trevor Project

Witness Justice