

# Mental Health Liaison Group

February 22, 2013

The Honorable Mark Begich  
United States Senate  
111 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Barber  
United States House of Representatives  
1029 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Begich and Congressman Barber:

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 2013 (S. 153/H.R. 274). 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. In fact, Vice President Biden's Gun Violence Task Force specifically endorsed Mental Health First Aid as part of a larger set of recommendations to improve America's mental health system.

As Congressman Barber put it in his recent letter to Vice President Biden, "we have failed to give the mental health care needs of Americans due attention for too long – and we paid too high a price for this neglect." 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

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers  
c/o Trevor Summerfield, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention at [tsummerfield@afsp.org](mailto:tsummerfield@afsp.org) and  
Julie Clements, American Psychiatric Association at [jclements@psych.org](mailto:jclements@psych.org)

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 Psychiatric 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  
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 State Mental Health Directors (NASMHPD)  
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare  
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
School Social Work Association of America  
Treatment Communities of America  
The Trevor Project