

# Mental Health Liaison Group

May 5, 1998

Honorable John D. Dingell  
Ranking Minority Member  
House Commerce Committee  
564 Ford House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Dingell:

As members of Mental Health Liaison Group -- a coalition composed of family, consumer and provider organizations -- we are writing to express our endorsement of the "Patients' Bill of Rights Act of 1998" (H.R. 3605/S. 1890).

This measure provides essential protections for consumers in the private health insurance marketplace, building on reforms in Medicare and Medicaid and on recommendations by Members of Congress and the President's Commission on Consumer Protection & Quality in the Health Care Industry. For example, the legislation requires the development of quality criteria along with performance and clinical outcome measures for at-risk individuals and people with chronic and severe illnesses. If H.R. 3605 is passed, this provision will have an important positive impact on the health care provided to adults with severe mental illnesses, children with serious emotional disturbances and other people with significant mental disorders who are increasingly being served in managed care settings.

The bill reforms the utilization review process to require the use of trained personnel, assures fair appeals, guarantees access to emergency and urgent care services and holds health plans accountable for their decisions. In addition, where medically necessary, S. 1890 permits consumers to go outside of a closed drug formulary to access critically needed medications.

Given the history of insurance discrimination against people with mental disorders and the serious problems associated with the delivery of mental health care by HMOs, the "Patients' Bill of Rights Act" represents a critical step forward.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers  
c/o Peter Newbould, American Psychological Association, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002

American Association of Pastoral Counselors  
American Association of Private Practice Psychiatrists  
American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work  
American Counseling Association  
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Nurses Association  
American Orthopsychiatric Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychiatric Nurses Association  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Psychological Association  
Anxiety Disorders Association of America  
Association for the Advancement of Psychology  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association of Behavioral Healthcare Management  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Children and Adults With Attention Deficit Disorders  
Child Welfare League of America  
Clinical Social Work Federation  
Corporation for the Advancement of Psychiatry  
Family Service America  
International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Association of Homes and Services for Children  
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems  
National Association of Psychiatric Treatment Centers for Children  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare  
National Mental Health Association