

Mental Health Liaison Group

September 7, 1999

Honorable Charlie Norwood
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Dr. Norwood:

As members of the Mental Health Liaison Group, we are writing to express our strong support for the Bipartisan Consensus Managed Care Improvement Act (H.R. 2723), which you have introduced with Representative John D. Dingell.

Broad bipartisan support for this new legislation represents a major breakthrough on behalf of patients' rights. It provides essential protections for all consumers in the private health insurance marketplace. MHLG is particularly pleased that the legislation contains provisions ensuring continuity of care for people with special health care needs and chronic conditions. Among other things, H.R. 2723 assures timely appeals, reforms the utilization review process to require the use of properly trained personnel and guarantees access to emergency and urgent care services (which is of specific concern to adults with severe mental illnesses and children with serious emotional disturbances).

Your bill includes much needed patient protections, strong reforms of the managed care industry and due process protections for providers. H.R. 2723 permits persons who have been injured by decisions of health plans that delay or deny care to hold them legally accountable. We believe that removal of this special exemption will be a strong incentive for health plans to deliver clinically necessary care, obviating the need for lawsuits.

H.R. 2723 also includes the requirement that those in closed panel health plans be offered a point of service plan at the time of enrollment, enabling care outside of a network. The bill includes a pro-competitive provision banning health plans from excluding a class of providers based solely on licensure. Medical necessity decisions would be made by clinical peers in a fair and independent appeals process, moving the system away from some of its worst abuses.

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 "Bipartisan Consensus Managed Care Improvement Act" represents a critical step forward.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association of Private Practice Psychiatrists
American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work
American Counseling Association
American Family Foundation
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Occupational Therapy 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
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Child Welfare League of America
Clinical Social Work Federation
Corporation for the Advancement of Psychiatry
Family Service America
Federation of Behavioral, Psychological & Cognitive Sciences
International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association for Rural Mental Health
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 Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association
National Mental Health Association