

February 10, 2009

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman, Education and Labor Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2205 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller:

The undersigned national organizations, representing a broad coalition of groups serving children and adolescents with mental health or substance use conditions, strongly support your efforts to better regulate boot camps and other “alternative placement facilities” and bring transparency to the policies and practices of such programs. The reintroduction of your important legislation is a welcomed and needed response to numerous studies documenting the ineffectiveness of these programs and, in several instances, the tragic deaths as a result of child abuse and neglect as reported by the GAO in October 2007.

Too many families struggle mightily in nearly every state to find placements, when appropriate, for their children that will address their complex mental health needs. These facilities flourish, in part, because parents lack the necessary information about the operation and practices of these programs. The promise of help cannot be allowed to obscure the fact that these kinds of programs are not science-based and have not been forthcoming about the incidence of neglect or abuse.

We applaud your resolve to address the challenges facing many families. Your crucial legislation would seek relief from these risks by (1) establishing standards for these programs that are consistent with current child protection laws; (2) ensuring that personnel is qualified; (3) shifting these programs to be family-centered, as well as culturally and developmentally appropriate; (4) creating mechanisms for the monitoring and enforcement of these goals; (5) calling for greater transparency and accessibility to the compliance of these standards; and (6) providing grants to states for the prevention of child abuse and neglect and for the treatment of children’s mental health or substance use conditions.

We also welcome your thoughtful approach to this legislation, and your call for an annual report to Congress is an effective tool in ensuring that these critical issues emerge from the shadows and see the light of day.

We share your vision and commitment in protecting this vulnerable population. Your bill recognizes that mental health and substance use conditions are prevalent among our nation’s youth and the reintroduction of your bill is an important step in addressing our nation’s mental health crisis among youth. We commend you for reintroducing this critical legislation.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Art Therapy Association
American Counseling Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association

American Psychological Association
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Children's Law and Policy
Children & Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Clinical Social Work Association
Correctional Education Association
Justice Policy Institute
Mental Health America
National Association of Pupil Services Administrators
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association State Mental Health Program Directors
National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations
National Disability Rights Network
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Foundation for Mental Health
The Sentencing Project
US Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association (USPRA)
Voices for America's Children
Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.