

Mental Health Liaison Group

April 1, 2011

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Whitehouse:

On behalf of the millions of Americans living with mental and substance use disorders, their families and communities, the undersigned organizations write today in strong support for the Behavioral Health Information Technology Act of 2011 (S. 539), a bill that extends the meaningful use incentives established through HITECH Act to mental health and substance abuse providers and facilities.

The HITECH Act provides \$20 billion in incentives and grants to health care providers and hospitals to establish interoperable electronic health record systems throughout the nation. These benefits are extended to most physicians, chiropractors, dentists, optometrists, podiatrists and most hospitals. However, an important sector of the health care community is excluded – clinical psychologists, clinical social workers, psychiatric hospitals, substance use treatment facilities and mental health treatment facilities.

The ultimate goal of widespread adoption of health information technology – to save American lives through improved coordination of care – is particularly relevant to persons with mental and addictive disorders. Recent studies have revealed that persons with serious mental illness die sooner than other Americans, and have an average age of death at 52. Health information technology (HIT) is the essential cornerstone of efforts to address this emerging public health crisis. HIT will enable behavioral health and substance abuse providers to effectively coordinate care across mental health and substance abuse service systems, primary care entities and specialty medicine.

The Behavioral Health Information Technology Act of 2011 would make important changes to Medicare and Medicaid to ensure that the incentives provided through the HITECH Act for the meaningful use of electronic medical records would allow for these mental health and substance use providers, hospitals and facilities to be on par with the rest of the nation in regards to the electronic exchange of health information and as a result improve the health and safety of all patients.

Our organizations look forward to working with you to pass this bill during the 112th Congress.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue

Sincerely,

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Association on Health and Disability *
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention/SPAN USA
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center for Clinical Social Work/ABE
Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU
The Jewish Federations of North America
Mental Health America
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Mental Health Planning & Advisory Councils
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Counties *
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Disability Rights Network
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Foundation for Mental Health *

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Therapeutic Communities of America
Tourette Syndrome Association
United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

** not a MHLG member*