

June 2, 2009

The Honorable Susan M. Collins
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senate
503 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Collins and Mikulski:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to applaud your ongoing commitment to the mental and behavioral health needs of older Americans and express our strong support for the *Positive Aging Act of 2009*. This important legislation will improve access to vital mental and behavioral health care for older adults by supporting the integration of mental health services in primary care and community settings.

An estimated 20 percent of community-based older adults in the U.S. have a mental health problem. These disorders can have a significant impact on both physical and mental health, often leading to increases in disease, disability, and mortality. In fact, men age 85 and older currently have the highest rates of suicide in our country and depression is the foremost risk factor. Evidence suggests that up to 75 percent of older adults who commit suicide have visited a primary care professional within 30 days of their death. Although effective treatments exist, the mental health needs of many older Americans go unrecognized and untreated because of poorly integrated systems of care to address the physical and mental health needs of seniors.

The *Positive Aging Act* takes an important step toward improving access to quality mental and behavioral health care for older adults by integrating mental health services in primary care and community settings where older adults reside and receive services. By supporting collaboration between interdisciplinary teams of mental health professionals and other providers of health and social services, this legislation promotes an integrated approach to addressing the health and well being of our nation's growing older adult population.

We commend you for your leadership and commitment to the mental and behavioral health needs of older adults and look forward to working with you to ensure that the *Positive Aging Act of 2009* is included as part of the upcoming health care reform efforts.

Sincerely,

Aging and Behavioral Health Alliance of East Central Ohio
Alliance for Aging Research
Alzheimer's Association
Alzheimer's Foundation of America
American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Nursing
American Academy of Nursing, Expert Panel on Aging
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging

American Association of Nurse Assessment Coordinators
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Geriatrics Society
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Postal Workers Union Retirees
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
American Society on Aging
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Health Care
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Council on Social Work Education
Direct Care Alliance
Geriatric Mental Health Alliance of New York
Gerontological Advance Practice Nurses Association
Gerontological Society of America
Kansas Mental Health and Aging Coalition
Kentucky Mental Health and Aging Coalition
Lutheran Services in America
Mental Health America
National Alliance for Caregiving
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Association of Directors of Nursing Administration in Long Term Care
National Association of Geriatric Education
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Coalition of Mental Health Consumer/Survivor Organizations
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Council on Aging
National Foundation for Mental Health
National Senior Citizens Law Center
National Senior Corps Association
National Spinal Cord Injury Association
New Hampshire Coalition on Substance Abuse/Mental Health and Aging
Oklahoma Mental Health and Aging Coalition
OWL - The Voice of Midlife and Older Women
Pennsylvania Behavioral Health and Aging Coalition
Psychologists in Long Term Care

Society of Clinical Geropsychology
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA
United Jewish Communities
United Spinal Association
Volunteers of America
Witness Justice