

August 1, 2008

The Honorable Gordon Smith
U.S. Senate
404 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
U.S. Senate
223 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Smith and Wyden:

On behalf of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare – an organization representing 1,400 Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) and other community mental health and substance abuse agencies serving over 6 million low-income children and adults with mental illnesses – I am writing to express our strongest possible support for the “Healing Our Nation’s Heroes Act.”

In a June 2007 report, the Department of Defense’s Mental Health Task Force highlights the growing mental health problems that troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are experiencing. The report points out that nearly 50 percent of National Guard members and reservists report symptoms of mental disorders — and many find it difficult to access military-provided clinical care and support groups. At the same time, community mental health providers are experiencing a workforce shortage, making it difficult for returning veterans to access the mental health and substance use disorder care they need.

The National Council applauds the inclusion of a grant program for mid-career professionals and recent graduates that will allow state and local mental health agencies, as well as non-profit mental health organizations, to establish, expand, or enhance recruitment and retention of mental health professionals. This program will help community providers retain and recruit the qualified staff they need to expand needed mental health services to returning veterans across the country.

In addition, the National Council supports the Heroes-to-Healers program that the Healing Our Nation’s Heroes Act would create. By bringing professionals with military experience into the mental health care field, this program will not only increase the mental health workforce but will increase the number of mental health professionals who understand the specialized needs of combat-affected veterans.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. We look forward to working with you and your staff as you work to advance this legislation in the 110th Congress.

Sincerely,



Linda Rosenberg, MSW, CSW
President and CEO