

October 15, 2007

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy  
The Honorable Pete V. Domenici  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Kennedy and Domenici:

On behalf of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, I am writing to thank you for your leadership in introducing the "Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Reauthorization and Improvement Act of 2007." The National Council represents over 1300 organizations providing treatment and rehabilitation to help people recover from mental illnesses and addiction disorders.

In 2007, approximately 16% of adult U.S. jail and prison inmates (350,000 individuals) suffer from serious mental illness. These numbers are even higher in the juvenile justice system. Most of these individuals are not violent or habitual criminals. Most have been charged or convicted of non-violent crimes that are a direct consequence of not having received needed treatment and supportive services for their mental illness.

The Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act (MIOTCRA) provides federal support for collaboration between criminal justice and mental health systems on jail diversion, correctional treatment, community reentry, and cross-training of criminal justice and mental health personnel. There is growing evidence that these types of collaborative initiatives make a significant impact in fostering recovery, improving treatment outcomes and decreasing recidivism.

In the two years that it has been funded, 53 planning and implementation grants have been provided to state, local and tribal governments throughout the U.S. through MIOTCRA. These programs are making a significant difference in their communities and regions. However, the need for these grants far exceeds their availability. Fewer than 20% of applicants have received funding in FYs 2006 and 2007.

The National Council and its members are grateful for your continuing leadership on this important federal program. We also greatly appreciate your ongoing efforts to expand federal support for Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) and police based diversion programs, Mental Health Courts, and other programs with proven effectiveness in helping people with mental illness and enhancing public safety. We stand ready to work with you to ensure continued federal support and strengthening of the MIOTCRA program.

Sincerely,

Linda Rosenberg, MSW, CSW  
President and CEO