



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
Community Health Centers

December 18, 2007

The Honorable Jack Reed
728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Gordon H. Smith
404 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Reed and Senator Smith:

On behalf of health centers all across the country and the 16 million Americans who rely on them for health care, I am writing to express our support for the “Community Mental Health Services Improvement Act,” (S. 2182) and your companion legislation, the “Community-Based Mental Health Infrastructure Improvements Act,” (S. 2183). Taken together, these bills are a positive step forward in improving the delivery of health care services to individuals with serious mental illnesses served in public mental health systems.

Health centers well understand the need to improve and expand Community Mental Health Centers (CMHC) facilities. Similarly, many health centers face the same challenge of modernizing, expanding, or constructing new facilities, and for that reason, we commend you for introducing S.2183, which would provide resources to address the capital improvement needs of CMHCs.

In addition, we also applaud you for your legislation, S. 2182, to further increase access to mental health care for individuals with mental disorders. The bill includes a number of provisions, including language that supports the further integration of behavioral health and primary care, improving the use of information technology, and tele-mental health services, which would help to ensure that individuals have access to critical behavioral treatment. While we support these provisions we are opposed to a provision in the legislation that would automatically designate CMHCs as Health Professional Shortage Areas without meeting the ability to pay requirement of the National Health Service Corps statute. We look forward to working with you and others to resolve this issue.

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of individuals with mental health illnesses. We look forward to working with you on this legislation.

Sincerely,

Craig Kennedy
Associate Vice-President for Federal and State Affairs

cc: National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare