



November 6, 2007

Dear Senator Reed and Senator Smith:

On behalf of county/local mental health, substance use disorders and developmental disabilities authorities, the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors (NACBHDD) are writing to thank you for your leadership in developing the Community Mental Health Services Improvement Act.

NACBHDD members are charged with financing, overseeing and planning county behavioral health programs in 22 states. In some areas, our members also provide direct delivery of services. Our members believe behavioral health is integral to overall health and individuals should have access to needed treatment and services.

We are pleased that this legislation addresses workforce issues. It is essential to recruit and retain qualified individuals who provide quality care. In addition, the bill's proposed tele-mental health and health information technology initiatives should increase access to care and assist in improving services.

We also welcome provisions of the bill that address improving the health care of people with mental disorders. A 2006 study from the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors indicated that on average, individuals with severe mental illness die 25 years sooner than individuals in the general population. Co-locating mental health and primary care is an important element highlighted in the legislation that will address these inexcusable death rates.

This legislation represents an important step in addressing critical areas of need in the public mental health system. We thank you for your timely introduction of this legislation and look forward to working with you as it proceeds through Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Naake". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Larry Naake, Executive Director
NACo

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen A. Witman". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Ellen Witman, Executive Director
NACBHDD