

March 13, 2008

The Honorable Gordon Smith  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Smith:

On behalf of the 1,400 community mental health and addictions provider organizations the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare represents, I am writing to thank you for introducing the Travel Assistance for Family Members of Our Troops Act of FY 2008 (S. 2689).

Under current policy, the Department of Defense does not classify active duty service members receiving inpatient treatment for mental illnesses as Very Seriously Ill/Injured or Seriously Ill/Injured. This policy renders family members of these soldiers, airmen, marines and sailors ineligible for the same travel allowances provided to those receiving treatment for physical injuries. S. 2689 will eliminate this disparity and provide the same support for family members of our uniformed servicemen and women receiving inpatient treatment for serious psychiatric conditions.

With proper and early support systems in place, including support of their families, we can work to prevent the more serious and chronic mental health issues that come from a lack of intervention. The Travel Assistance for Family Members of Our Troops Act of FY 2008 ensures that patients with serious mental impairments can spend time with their family; the same treatment that we are currently providing to patients with serious physical injuries requiring inpatient care. There is no greater obligation than caring for those who have served this country through their military service.

Thank you for your leadership on this vital issue. We look forward to working with you and your staff as this bill makes its way through the Senate.

Sincerely,



Linda Rosenberg, MSW, CSW  
President and CEO