Mental Health Liaison Group

September 10, 2012

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Dear Senators:

The undersigned national organizations in the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) urge you to support U.S. ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The CRPD was submitted to the Senate on May 17, 2012, and on July 26, 2012, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed a resolution of advice and consent supporting the Convention by a bipartisan vote of 13 to 6.

The MHLG is a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers. As trusted leaders in the behavioral health community, we engage in education and advocacy efforts relating to mental health, mental illness and addiction disorders.

Similar to the principles of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the principles of the CRPD include equality, non-discrimination, full inclusion in society, accessibility, and respect for individuals' dignity. Twenty two years ago on July 26th, President George H.W. Bush signed the ADA, calling for the "shameful walls of exclusion [to] finally come tumbling down." Since that time, the ADA has served as model legislation for ending discriminatory practices throughout the world, and a key inspiration for the CRPD.

One hundred and seventeen nations have ratified the CRPD, including important allies of the U.S. The treaty reflects core American values such as the dignity of the individual, access to justice, respect for the home and family, and the right to education. The CRPD is consistent with not only the ADA, but also with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and numerous other U.S. laws protecting people with disabilities.

The CRPD aims to ensure that countries across the globe provide people with disabilities the same rights as everyone else in order to live full, satisfying and productive lives. Ratification of the treaty by the United States will send a needed signal around the world about the importance of enabling individuals with disabilities to be full participants in society.

This treaty is a forum for worldwide progress to empower people with mental disabilities to live and work in the community. We believe the ratification of the CRPD will allow the U.S. to continue its global leadership on disability rights. We therefore urge the Senate to continue the bipartisan tradition of supporting people with disabilities by uniting in support of ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Laurel Stine, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law at laurels@bazelon.org, Trevor Summerfield, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention at tsummerfield@afsp.org and Julie Clements, American Psychiatric Association at jclements@psych.org

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Association on Health and Disability *
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychological Association
American Psychotherapy Association
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Clinical Social Work Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
International Nurses Society on Addictions *
Jewish Federations of North America
Mental Health America
NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Social Workers
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Disability Rights Network
NHMH - No Health without Mental Health
Ohio Association of County Boards Serving People with Developmental Disabilities *
Peer Assistance Services, Inc. *
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America *
School Social Work Association of America
The California Institute for Mental Health *
Tourette Syndrome Association
Treatment Communities of America
Witness Justice

* not a MHLG member

CC: The Honorable John Kerry
The Honorable John McCain
The Honorable Richard Durbin
The Honorable John Barrasso
The Honorable Tom Udall
The Honorable Tom Harkin