



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

June 27, 2014

Hon. Ron Barber
1029 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Barber:

The undersigned members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) write to express our support for the Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act, H.R. 4574. CCD is a coalition of national disability organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures full equality, self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society.

We applaud you for introducing this important legislation that would bring significant and positive change to our mental health service systems, including promoting compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the *Olmstead* decision. H.R. 4574 aims to address the most critical problem we face—the unavailability of community-based services. While we have services that enable people with even the most significant psychiatric disabilities to succeed in their own homes and communities, these services remain unavailable to many thousands of people who need them. Instead, our mental health systems continue to over-rely on costly institutional services with poor outcomes. As a result, many individuals experience preventable hospitalizations, emergency department visits, shelter use, and incarceration.

We are encouraged to see that H.R. 4574 would reauthorize and adequately fund the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) program. This program has helped bring about some of the most significant improvements in the lives of individuals with psychiatric disabilities over the past several decades. It has played a critical role in protecting the rights of individuals with mental health needs in education, housing, employment, health care, and other areas, as well as investigating and stopping abuse and neglect.

We support the bill's reauthorization of other important programs funded through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, including, for example, critically important peer-run services programs, suicide prevention programs, and programs addressing childhood trauma. In addition, the creation of a White House Office of Mental Health Policy and a National Strategy on Mental Health would bring much-needed national attention to the challenges that our mental health systems have faced for years. A coordinated federal approach would also

help federal agencies work together to promote a coherent national strategy and advance needed changes to mental health systems.

We also appreciate the bill's focus on increasing access to school-employed mental health professionals and comprehensive school-based mental health supports. The increased coordination of mental health services for youth, including the expansion of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students program, would improve our ability to identify students and families in need of mental health services and provide effective interventions at school.

We stand ready to work with you to advance this important legislation.

Sincerely,

American Association of People with Disabilities
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Washington DC 20006

American Association on Health and Disability
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American Dance Therapy Association
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American Foundation for the Blind
1660 L Street NW, Suite 513
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American Music Therapy Association
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Silver Spring MD 20910

The Arc of the United States
1825 K Street NW #1200
Washington DC 20006

Attention Deficit Disorder Association
PO Box 7557
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Association of University Centers on Disabilities
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Autistic Self Advocacy Network
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Washington, DC 20035

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
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Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
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Disability Rights Legal Center
Loyola Law School Public Interest Law Center
800 South Figueroa Street, Suite 1120
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Epilepsy Foundation
8301 Professional Place
Landover, MD 20785

Lutheran Services in America Disability Network
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Mental Health America
2000 N. Beauregard Street, 6th Floor
Alexandria, VA 22311

National Association of School Psychologists
4340 East West Highway, Suite 402
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National Council on Independent Living
2013 H St. NW, 6th Floor
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National Disability Rights Network
900 Second Street NE, Suite 211
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National Respite Coalition
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National Senior Citizens Law Center
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