



April 23, 2008

The Honorable George Miller  
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Miller:

On behalf of the 210,000 members and 1,100 affiliates of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), I am writing to express strong support for the Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2008, your legislation to require standards and enforcement provisions to prevent child abuse and neglect in residential treatment programs. NAMI strongly supports this important effort to regulate programs that include children and adolescents with serious mental health treatment needs. As the nation's largest organization representing children and adults living with severe mental illness and their families, NAMI is pleased to support this critically important measure.

As you know, there is a tremendous urgency to address the abuse and neglect that currently exists in far too many residential treatment, boot camp, and wilderness programs in our nation. This has now been well documented in media reports and in reports released by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO). Families with children and adolescents with mental illnesses have turned to these programs, the overwhelming majority of which are unlicensed and unregulated, in desperation when other mental health services have not been available for their child. Many of these families have been shocked to learn about the harsh, punitive, and excessive measures that are used in these programs. These practices have resulted in death, in serious bodily injury, and have greatly harmed children, including many with serious mental health treatment needs. Many of these programs are unregulated and employ outrageous practices that they claim are therapeutic and benefit children. It is essential for the federal government to protect the health and well-being of vulnerable children and to provide oversight to help end these troubling practices. Children and adolescents with mental illnesses need effective mental health treatment, not to be subjected to programs involving abuse and neglect.

NAMI applauds your leadership in introducing legislation that promises to bring effective monitoring and enforcement to help eliminate the troubling practices that exist in many of these otherwise unregulated and unlicensed residential treatment, boot camp, and wilderness programs. The legislation also promises to inform families about incidents involving these programs that will help inform their decisions about placement for their child. Many families turn to these programs as a last resort for a child with serious mental health treatment needs when other services are simply not available.

NAMI looks forward to working with you to ensure passage of the Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2008 to help end the child abuse and neglect that too often exists in unlicensed and unregulated residential treatment, boot camp, and wilderness programs.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Fitzpatrick, M.S.W.  
Executive Director