

October 22, 2001

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education
Appropriations Subcommittee
123 Hart SOB
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ralph Regula
Chairman, House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education
Appropriations Subcommittee
2358 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Harkin and Regula:

The Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) urges you to make the emotional and behavioral needs of youth a funding priority in any final FY2002 Labor, Health and Human Services (HHS) Appropriations package.

We urge you to build upon the critically needed increases for mental health and prevention funding provided in the FY2002 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (Labor, HHS) Appropriations bill (H.R. 3061) recently passed by the House

of Representatives and upon provisions in the Senate Labor, HHS bill (S.1536) providing funding for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students program that encourages parents, students, families, schools, and communities to work together to promote healthy childhood development and to prevent violent behavior and drug and alcohol use by youth.

As the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee documented at a September 26 hearing on the psychological impact of the recent terrorist attacks, our mental health infrastructure has been chronically under-funded and is ill-equipped to address the long-term impact of the events of September 11th. Our Nation's children are among those most affected by the terrorist attacks. Unlike adults, children have little experience to help them put these traumatic events into perspective. The emotional and behavioral needs of our youth remain critical, and schools and communities need continued support in delivering prevention and intervention services to address these needs.

The programs outlined below are well positioned to help communities across the country address the social and emotional development needs of all children. Increased funding for these programs will be needed to help communities develop coordinated efforts (linking mental health, education, primary care, and others) to conduct outreach and early intervention to ensure that effective services are provided to those who need them.

As you wrap up negotiations on the FY 2002 Labor, HHS Appropriations measure, we urge you to support the following programs that address the emotional and behavioral needs of our youth.

* Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative (SS/HS): This collaborative initiative - administered jointly by the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services and Justice - helps school districts to collaborate with local mental health and law enforcement agencies to

develop comprehensive, community-wide violence prevention programs based on proven strategies for fostering school safety and healthy youth development. We recommend maintaining funding through the Department of Education's Safe and Drug Free Schools National Programs account to at least the FY 2001 level of \$117 million as provided in the Senate bill (S.1536).

* Youth Violence Prevention Initiatives: The Center for Mental Health Services, within the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, supports several important youth violence prevention initiatives including Safe Schools/Healthy Students. CMHS also funds School and Community Action Grants designed to help localities to expand their youth violence prevention efforts in a more targeted fashion by building community consensus to implement exemplary practices regarding violence prevention and resiliency development. Communities across the country need assistance in establishing fundamental social and emotional development, mental health, and violence prevention strategies for their children. We urge you to build upon the House funding increase of \$10 million for youth violence prevention initiatives through CMHS from \$90 million to \$100 million.

* Elementary School Counseling Demonstration Act (ESCDA): ESCDA is a competitive grant program that awards funds to school districts most in need of school-based counseling services. ESCDA is effective in helping to reduce school violence by reducing classroom disturbance, school suspensions, and the use of weapons. Additionally, the ESCDA will also help to promote student academic achievement, health and general well being by addressing barriers to learning and helping to provide a safe learning environment. We urge you to support the Senate funding level of \$35 million to enable this program to reach more school districts.

* Finally, we urge you to support an initiative by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish a National Violent Death Reporting System to provide accurate and timely information for policy-makers to use in evaluating the magnitude, trends, and characteristics of violent deaths nationwide. This type of data, which the Surgeon General's Report on Youth Violence highlighted as the key to violence prevention, will serve as a critical component of our Nation's efforts to curb youth violence.

We hope to continue to work with you to ensure that the federal government addresses the significant unmet needs of our Nation's youth for additional violence prevention and healthy social and emotional development services. We urge you to support using the House emotional and behavioral health funding levels and the Senate funding levels for the Safe Schools/Healthy Students program as a "floor" on which conferees on a final funding measure should build. Thank you in advance for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

cc: The Honorable Arlen Specter, Ranking Member, Senate Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee
The Honorable David Obey, Ranking Member, House Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee