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October 17, 2007

The Honorable Patrick Kennedy
U.S. House of Representatives
407 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Kennedy:

I write on behalf of the American Bar Association (ABA) to commend you for your leadership in introducing the Juvenile Crime Reduction Act of 2007 (H.R. 3411) and to express our strong support for enactment of this important initiative. The ABA shares the concerns of a broad coalition of organizations that advocate for juvenile justice reform that Congress must do more to address the complex problem presented by the prevalence of young people with mental health disorders that come into contact with the juvenile justice system. In February 2004, the ABA House of Delegates approved a set of recommendations on this subject proposed by the ABA Criminal Justice Section urging Congress and state legislatures to comprehensively strengthen the resources, programs, policies and laws that shape the response of the adult and juvenile justice systems to contact with persons with mental illness or mental disorders. We believe enactment of the Juvenile Crime Reduction Act would significantly improve the justice systems response to these youth and help to reduce juvenile crime.

Studies have shown that as many as 70 percent of youth in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental health disorder, many of which go entirely untreated. We agree with your bill's approach to reducing juvenile crime through greater collaboration among all stakeholders; increased training for juvenile court services, probation, corrections and law enforcement personnel, educators and school staff, home, family and community-based treatment providers; and increased support for technical assistance.

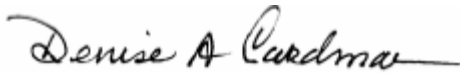
Your bill will address the shameful plight of many young people with mental disorders who are being referred inappropriately to the juvenile justice system. H.R. 3411 would put into motion a strategy to divert, whenever appropriate, those juveniles from confinement into home- family- and community-based care; early detection of mental health and substance abuse disorders of juveniles in the justice system; and implementing programs and services that have been proven to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for juvenile offenders.

In addition, the Juvenile Crime Reduction Act would encourage comprehensive collaborations between schools, law enforcement, public health and mental health

agencies, community-based organizations, the juvenile court and other local systems and organizations responsible for court-involved youth and juveniles at-risk of court-involvement. H.R. 3411 would also create reporting requirements for the Department of Justice that will improve our understanding of the prevalence of individuals with mental health and substance abuse disorders in the juvenile justice system. Lastly, it would create regional technical assistance centers to assist juvenile justice agencies in reforming their practices and in all matters related to juveniles with mental health and substance abuse disorders.

We commend you for introducing the Juvenile Crime Reduction Act of 2007 and we urge your colleagues to support H.R. 3411 and work with you toward its passage by the full House of Representatives this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Denise A. Cardman". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Denise A. Cardman
Acting Director

Cc: The Honorable George Miller, Chairman, House Education and Labor Committee
The Honorable Carolyn McCarthy, Chairman, House Education and Labor Subcommittee
on Healthy Families and Communities