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March 26, 2003

The Honorable Pete Stark
239 Cannon House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Stark:

The undersigned national mental health advocacy organizations are pleased to offer our support for the Realizing the Spirit of IDEA Act, important legislation you will soon be introducing in the House.

On behalf of our diverse constituency, representing children with disabilities and their families, advocates, providers and professionals, we are concerned about the educational outcomes of students with disabilities who require special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). As you well know, students with disabilities have lower rates of graduation, attendance and overall academic achievement than students without disabilities. Improving these rates and closing the gaps in academic performance between regular education and special education students is of vital importance to our constituencies and is a goal shared by your legislation.

The Realizing the Spirit of IDEA Act would help children with disabilities benefit from education by providing schools with financial incentives to improve special education students' school performance. The mandatory federal funding provided under the legislation would be based on a school's ability to demonstrate improved outcomes on important measures, including attendance, graduation, drop out rates and post secondary education and employment. Furthermore, the legislation encourages schools to make use of available best practice interventions in an effort to assist students with special education needs to fully realize their academic potential — and ultimately realize the true spirit of IDEA.

We look forward to working with you this year to enact the Realizing the Spirit of IDEA Act. Thank you for your continued leadership on behalf of student's with disabilities and their families.

Sincerely,

Laurel L. Stine
Director of Federal Relations
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Submitted on behalf of:

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Counseling Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Mental Health Association