

[DATE]

[REPRESENTATIVE/SENATOR] [FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME]
[ADDRESS]
[CITY, STATE ZIP]

Dear [REPRESENTATIVE/SENATOR] [LAST NAME]:

The recent tragedy in Tucson reminds us all of the importance of protecting state funding for the prevention, identification and effective treatment of mental illness in children and youth. While we may never know the whole story, signs point to untreated mental illness as a potentially significant factor. As a legislator, you have the opportunity to protect mental health spending and to make the early identification of mental illness and effective treatment services a priority in the 2012 budget.

Mental illness is real, treatable and impacts approximately 20 percent of our nation's youth. Yet, the majority do not receive treatment. When left untreated, these disorders can lead to tragic consequences, including the loss of critical developmental years, school drop-out, involvement with law enforcement and suicide.

The good news is that when we identify and treat mental illness early, we can improve outcomes and help our youth lead productive lives. We ask our state legislators to safeguard our youth by taking the following six steps:

1. Preserve mental health budgets that provide needed mental health services and supports for children, their families and communities;
2. Require state Medicaid officials to follow the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) provisions of the federal law;
3. Require schools to become well-informed about the early warning signs of mental illness;
4. Ensure that schools have adequate resources to provide and link students with effective mental health services and supports;
5. Require systems that serve children, youth and young adults to provide an appropriate array of effective mental health services and supports; and
6. Ensure that families understand how to access these services.

We understand that [STATE] is facing unprecedented budget challenges, but as the events in Tucson remind us, children with mental illness cannot wait for better budget years. Service cuts devastate our children and families and threaten the health and well-being of our communities. Funds must be available for the prevention, identification and treatment of mental illness in children and youth.

We stand ready to work with you to become part of the solution.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[CITY], [STATE]

Part of a national coalition of parents, educators and mental health professionals united to ensure the mental health and well-being of our nation's children and adolescents.

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)
American School Counselor Association (ASCA)
Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation (CABF)
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
Mental Health America (MHA)
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)