

April 17, 2008

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services
Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services
Education and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
156 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Specter:

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to request that the Subcommittee provide \$30 million for FY 2009 to fund the Department of Health and Human Services programs authorized by the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Act. Further, we respectfully request that the Subcommittee provide sufficient funding in FY 2009 to enable the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) within the Department of Education to sustain and increase its medical rehabilitation research portfolio and to continue its annual allocation of at least \$8.3 million to fund 16 TBI Model Systems research centers. Attached is a copy of a similar request made by 38 Members of Congress to your counterparts in the House of Representatives.

With regard to the TBI Act programs, we specifically request:

- **\$9 million** for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention TBI Registries and Surveillance, Prevention and National Public Education/Awareness;
- **\$15 million** for the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Federal TBI State Grant Program; and
- **\$6 million** for the HRSA Federal TBI Protection & Advocacy (P&A) Systems Grant Program.

While Congress and the media have acknowledged that TBI is the signature injury resulting from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, federal funding for these important TBI programs has deteriorated over the last several years. Congress has not provided increases sufficient to keep up with inflation, and last year funding was reduced from \$8.91 million to \$8.75 million for the HRSA Federal TBI State and P&A Grant Programs.

At the same time, hundreds of millions of dollars are rightfully being infused into the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs for TBI research, rehabilitation and care. However, there is a disconnect when it comes to funding the nation's overall infrastructure for addressing this major public health issue. Our nation's public health and disability systems must be supported, especially in light of the prevalence of TBI, misdiagnosis and underdiagnosis, as well as the long-term needs that servicemembers and veterans have, including rehabilitation and community reintegration. As servicemembers and veterans return home, community and

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local resources, which provide information to better understand and address TBI symptoms and rehabilitative needs, are positioned to play a vital role in maximizing quality of life for veterans and their families. These resources must be funded sufficiently in order to do so.

These community and local resources are already underfunded, as for the past eleven years Congress has provided minimal funding through the HRSA Federal TBI Program to assist States in developing services and systems to help individuals with a range of service and family support needs following their loved ones' injuries. Similarly, the grants to state Protection & Advocacy Systems to assist individuals with traumatic brain injury in accessing services through education, legal and advocacy remedies are woefully underfunded. Rehabilitation, community support and long-term care systems are still developing in many States, while stretched to capacity in other States. Additional numbers of individuals with traumatic brain injury as the result of war related injuries only adds more stress to these inadequately funded systems. It is essential that Congress provide States and state Protection & Advocacy systems with sufficient resources to address both the civilian and military populations who look to them for much needed support in order to live and work in their communities.

Funding for the TBI Model Systems is urgently needed to ensure that the nation's valuable TBI research capacity is not diminished, and to maintain the 16 TBI Model Systems research centers around the country. The FY 2008 Defense Authorization bill (P.L. 110-181) includes specific language directing new TBI research efforts within the Department of Veterans Affairs to collaborate with NIDRR TBI research programs, such as the TBI Model Systems of Care. The TBI Model Systems of Care program represents an already existing vital national network of expertise and research in the field of TBI, and weakening this program would have deleterious effects on both military and civilian populations. Last year, Congress provided \$900,000 in additional stopgap funding for the TBI Model Systems of Care program in order to ensure that the nation's valuable TBI research capacity was not diminished, and to maintain 16 TBI research centers around the country. It is essential that Congress provide sufficient funding in FY 2009 to enable NIDRR to sustain and increase its medical rehabilitation research portfolio and to continue its annual allocation of at least \$8.3 million to fund 16 TBI Model Systems research centers.

We urge you to address the policy disconnect and consider favorably these requests to provide additional funding in FY 2009 for TBI Act programs, as well as for the TBI Model Systems which conduct vital research in coordination with new and ongoing TBI research efforts in the military sector.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine
American Music Therapy Association

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American Physical Therapy Association
Association of Academic Physiatrists
Blinded Veterans Association
Brain Injury Association of America
California Brain Injury Association
Coalition for American Trauma Care
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
Council for Learning Disabilities
Easter Seals, Inc.
Epilepsy Foundation
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of Private Special Education Centers
National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Brain Injury Research, Treatment and Training Foundation
National Disability Rights Network
National Respite Coalition
New York Traumatic Brain Injury Model System
North American Brain Injury Society
Paralyzed Veterans of America
Society of Trauma Nurses
The Arc of the United States
UAB Traumatic Brain Injury Model System
United Cerebral Palsy

Attachment