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February 10, 2009

The Honorable George Miller  
Chair, Education and Labor Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2205 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Carolyn McCarthy  
Chair, Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities  
Education and Labor Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2346 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Miller and Chairwoman McCarthy:

The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law—the leading national legal-advocacy organization dedicated to protecting the rights of children and adults with mental disabilities—is pleased to support the Stop Child Abuse in Residential Programs for Teens Act of 2009 (HR 911).

Your legislation is vital to addressing the thousands of horrific cases and allegations of grave physical and psychological abuse and neglect in residential programs, such as boot camps, therapeutic schools, wilderness programs and behavior modification facilities across the nation. As you well know, last Congress the Government Accountability Office reported on these incidents and swift enactment of your legislation is essential to bringing critical oversight, transparency and sound standards to the policies and practices of such programs that seek to serve children in crisis.

Many families, with little information on where to turn for their troubled youth, have become victim to this largely unregulated industry when trying to find an appropriate setting to help their children with mental and emotional needs. Among the many hallmarks of HR 911, the legislation would also assist parents with information to help them make informed choices about their children's care in these placements and to prevent deceptive marketing practices by operators of these facilities.

Protecting vulnerable children and ensuring they receive proper services and supports is paramount in helping to address our nation's mental health crisis. Residential programs that purport to serve youth in crisis that are ineffective and not evidence-based must not flourish, when other community-based alternatives exist that produce positive short and long term results for children with mental health needs.

We applaud you for your leadership on protecting our nation's vulnerable youth and we look forward to working with you to enact this important bill.

Sincerely,

Laurel L. Stine  
Director, Federal Relations