

SAMPLE POSITION LETTER

(Note: This is an example of an organizational letter supporting a state legislative bill. The name of the state, the organization and the bill number have been removed. Documentation for the data below was supplied with the letter.)

Dear (Name):

Children are the foundation of our future and our most important resource. They need our protection, especially when they have been placed in the care of our foster care system. AB(bill number) would increase protection for a dependent child or ward as regards to their placement on psychotropic medications. We support this bill because it is a start in safeguarding foster children who could be prescribed these drugs. At the same time we emphatically state that we are against any use of psychotropic drugs because of their harmful effects

The reasons for our position, as expanded upon below, are:

- These drugs are extremely dangerous and continue to be prescribed to children even though research shows that they are no better than placebos.
- There are no objective, scientific tests for mental disorders and this fact results in misdiagnosis.
- Research has demonstrated that pharmaceutical companies influence doctors who set policy on clinical treatment. While state aid contributes to the more than \$25 billion in drug sales per year, it is the foster children who are suffering from the abuse by vested interests.
- Mental disorders are often misdiagnosed physical problems which then go untreated.

Dangers of psychotropic drugs:

Psychotropic drugs are extremely dangerous. In fact, it is estimated that over 4,000 children under the age of 18 died from psychiatric drugs between 2004 and 2006. This figure is based on the FDA's Adverse Drug Reactions reports. These drugs pose such a threat that twelve international drug regulatory agencies have issued warnings on stimulants like ritalin causing addiction, depression, insomnia, mania, psychosis, heart problems, stroke and sudden death.

It cannot even be argued that the drugs provide benefits to outweigh their risks. The *New England Journal of Medicine* published suppressed data from drug companies that proved antidepressants work no better than a placebo. Yet the number of psychiatric drug prescriptions for California foster children rocketed a shocking 77% between 2001 and 2005 according to a May 2006 *USA Today* article titled "For Foster Kids Oversight of Prescriptions is Scarce."

Subjective diagnosis:

One factor behind this increase is the subjective diagnosis of mental disorders. There is no objective, scientific test as there are for medical conditions. In an article published in *Psychiatric Times*, psychiatrist Dr. David Kaiser wrote, "Patients [have] been diagnosed with 'chemical imbalances' despite the fact that no test exists to support such a claim, and that there is no real conception of what a correct chemical balance would look like."

If you doubt that diagnosis of mental disorders is subjective, consider psychiatrists' use of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV (DSM). Without any scientific evidence, the DSM has labeled almost every conceivable variation on behavior that someone could find objectionable as mental disorders: shyness, student failure, childhood behavior, crisis of faith, unhappiness, anger, drug use, and adverse effects from drug use (including sleep problems from drinking more than two cups of coffee, for example, found on page 601 of DSM IV as a billable disorder!). The list of "disorders" in the new edition of the DSM are so outrageous that the reviewer for the *The Washington Post* subheaded his article "Handbook suggests that deviations from 'normality' are disorders."

Vested interests:

Such lack of objectivity goes hand-in-hand with abuse by vested interests. In a report on pharmaceutical ties to doctors who set policy on clinical treatment, *The Boston Globe* wrote that according to preliminary research, "Virtually all the psychiatrists who wrote the latest clinical guidelines for how to treat depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia had financial ties to drug companies....The guidelines focus heavily on medications and give relatively little attention to nondrug treatments and how and when to phase out drugs prescribed for mentally ill patients." According to the authors, three common diagnoses generate some \$25 billion in drug sales per year. Not only are these drug sales contributing to our state deficit as evidenced by the (name of state) Health Care Foundation's study of 2007 showing the largest increases in (name of state health care program) drug expenditures were antipsychotic medications, they are seriously harming our foster children.

Physical illness left untreated:

Additionally, there is a real problem with people of any age being diagnosed as having a mental disorder when they actually have a physical illness or situation. In a field manual compiled at the order of the state legislature and produced for the (name of state) Department of Mental Health and Local Mental Health Programs, it was found that the mental health system failed to detect more than half of the physical diseases that were exacerbating a patient's mental disorder and that it did not detect one in six physical diseases that were causing a patient's mental disorder. There are other numerous research studies with similar conclusions. For instance, an article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showed that of 215 consecutive patients admitted to a hospital in (name of city), 41% had physical disorders that were misdiagnosed as psychiatric.

Of course foster children, who have suffered the trauma of neglect, been removed from their homes, and experienced placement instabilities, would feel the brunt of life's troubles. But the answer is not to subject them to dangerous drugs. Since AB (bill number) is a start in putting safeguards in place, we urge you to vote yes on this bill.

I repeat that (name of organization) does not support the use of psychotropic drugs and considers it inhumane to treat children exhibiting normal emotions associated with broken families as a mental disorder. These children need caring and loving adults, not powerful and dangerous psychiatric drugs. However we do support the added precautions that this bill will provide.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote yes on this bill. We ask you to look over the material that we have provided and make up your own mind. If you require any other information, we are ready to help.

Sincerely yours,

Name of Executive Director