

HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS BEFORE THE US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES October 6, 2004

No Mandatory Mental Health Screening for Kids

Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce the Let Parents Raise Their Kids Act. This bill forbids federal funds from being used for any universal or mandatory mental-health screening of students without the express, written, voluntary, informed consent of their parents or legal guardians. This bill protects the fundamental right of parents to direct and control the upbringing and education of their children.

The New Freedom Commission on Mental Health has recommended that the federal government adopt a comprehensive system of mental-health screening for all Americans.

The commission recommends the government implement universal or mandatory mental-health screening in public schools as a prelude to expanding it to the general public. However, neither the commission's report nor any related mental-health screening proposal requires parental consent before a child is subjected to such screening. Federally funded universal or mandatory mental-health screening in schools without parental consent could lead to labeling more children as "ADD" or "hyperactive," and thus force more children to take psychotropic drugs like Ritalin against their parents' wishes.

Already, too many children are suffering from being prescribed psychotropic drugs for nothing more than children's typical rambunctious behavior. According to the Journal of the American Medical Association, there was a 300-percent increase in psychotropic drug use in two to four-year old children from 1991 to 1995!

Many children have suffered harmful side effects from using psychotropic drugs. Some of the possible side effects include mania, violence, dependence, and weight gain. Yet parents already are being threatened with child abuse charges if they resist efforts to drug their children. Imagine how much easier it will be to drug children against their parents' wishes if a federal mental-health screener makes the recommendation.

Universal or mandatory mental-health screening could also provide a justification for stigmatizing children from families that support traditional values. Even the authors of mental-health diagnosis manuals admit that mental-health diagnoses are subjective and based on social constructions. Therefore, it is all too easy for a psychiatrist to label a person's disagreement with the psychiatrist's political beliefs a mental disorder. For example, a federally funded school violence prevention program lists "intolerance" as a mental problem that may lead to school violence. Because "intolerance" is often a code word for believing in traditional values, children who share their parents' values could be labeled as having mental problems and a risk of causing violence. If the mandatory mental-health screening program applies to adults, everyone who believes in traditional values could have his or her beliefs stigmatized as a sign of a mental disorder. Taxpayer dollars should not support programs that may label those who adhere to traditional values as having a "mental disorder."

Mr. Speaker, universal or mandatory mental-health screening threatens to undermine parents' right to raise their children as the parents see fit. Forced mental-health screening could also endanger the health of children by leading to more children being improperly placed on psychotropic drugs, such as Ritalin, or stigmatized as "mentally ill" or a risk of causing violence because they adhere to traditional values. Congress has a responsibility to the nation's parents and children to stop this from happening. I, therefore, urge my colleagues to cosponsor the Let Raise Their Kids Act.