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APA Applauds Signing of Suicide Prevention Law

Arlington, Va. – At the invitation of President Bush, American Psychiatric Association (APA) President Michelle Riba, M.D., M.S., attended a White House signing ceremony for the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act today. She praised the president and Congress for enacting the youth suicide prevention bill, which will improve access to mental health care on college campuses.

“We applaud the president and Congress for passing this new law to help address youth suicide – a major national health problem and the third leading cause of death among persons aged 10-24 in the United States,” said Dr. Riba. “The Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act is a vital step forward in raising public awareness about suicide, and in providing funds for suicide prevention and mental health services on college campuses.”

The Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act (S. 2634) passed both the House and Senate in September and amends the Public Health Act, authorizing \$82 million in grant money over three years to states, Indian tribes and colleges and universities. The grants will support development of youth suicide prevention and intervention programs.

The bill also calls for early screening programs to identify mental illnesses in children and provide treatment referrals, training for community childcare professionals and establishment of a Youth Interagency Research, Training and Technical Assistance Center. The center will provide training and technical assistance to states.

The law is a combination of separate APA-supported bills. The bills were introduced by Senators Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), Jack Reed (D-R.I.), and Mike DeWine (R-Ohio) under the personal leadership of Senator Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), whose late son the law is named for.

“The APA commends Senators Dodd, Reed, DeWine and others, and most particularly Senator Smith, for tenacious efforts to move the legislation through the Senate and House and to the president,” said Dr. Riba. “This law can make a real difference in getting help to young people before they act to harm themselves.”

Dr. Riba is clinical professor of psychiatry and associate chair for education and academic affairs at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. She is also a member of the University of Michigan Depression Center.

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society, founded in 1844, whose nearly 36,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. For more information, visit the APA Web site at www.psych.org.

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