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VOR Statement to the American Psychiatric Association Regarding Proposed Changes to Text on Neurodevelopmental Disorders in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM-V)

VOR is a national non-profit organization that has advocated for the past 36 years for high quality care and the human rights of all individuals with I/DD. Our membership is primarily comprised of families of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Many of our loved ones function in the severe and profound range of intellectual disability (ID) and may have accompanying complex medical conditions and/or are prone to aggressive or self-injurious behaviors.

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the proposed change in text to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fifth Edition) (DSM-5) that speaks to the application of the diagnostic criteria for intellectual disability.

VOR is not opposed to the sentence in the DSM-5 text that has caused concern for the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD). Nevertheless, we support American Psychiatric Association's (APA) proposed text change that clarifies the relationship between Criterion A and Criterion B for intellectual disability, specifically that deficits in adaptive functions (Criterion B) are a consequence of intellectual deficits defined in Criterion A.

VOR's membership is deeply and adversely affected by an ideology espoused by advocacy groups that promote full inclusion for everyone with intellectual disability, regardless of the severity of their impairment, their needs, their choices, or the choices of their parents or legal guardians. Such advocacy misrepresents the seriousness of a diagnosis of intellectual disability. It assigns to all members of the ID community capabilities that many do not have, and in fact, cannot have because of the degree to which their adaptive functions have been compromised or completely devastated by the presence of intellectual deficits that can range from mild to profound. Any attempt to decouple the relationship between intellectual and adaptive deficits clouds and trivializes the effects of an intellectual impairment; doing so has detrimental consequences that can extend to the availability of appropriate care and treatment.

APA's text maintains intellectual disability (formerly mental retardation) as a specific and unique diagnosis that honors a category of disability worthy of recognition and consideration in public policy. As medical doctors, APA understands the direct connection between diagnosis and treatment. By preserving its diagnostic criteria for intellectual disability, APA helps to protect a continuum of care and full range of community and facility-based supports for the vulnerable population of individuals with ID.

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