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A Message Regarding the "Ransom Notes" Public Awareness Campaign

When we launched our "Ransom Notes" public awareness campaign two weeks ago, our goal was to call attention to the millions of children with untreated psychiatric and learning disorders. We wanted a campaign that would grab people's attention, break through the clutter, and serve as a wake up call to what we believe is America's last silent public health crisis. We felt something dramatic was needed to call attention to the dire outlook for children with untreated disorders: higher risk for academic failure, school dropout, substance abuse, suicide, unemployment, and imprisonment.

The campaign succeeded in getting people's attention and sparking dialogue, but much of the debate centered on the ads instead of the issues. We've received thousands of calls and letters from parents, mental health professionals, educators, advocates, and concerned third parties, all of whom are passionate about helping children. While many people praised the campaign and urged us to stay the course, others were troubled by it.

Though we meant well, we've come to realize that we unintentionally hurt and offended some people. We've read all the emails, both pro and con, listened to phone calls, and have spoken with many parents who are working day and night to get their children the help they need. We have decided to conclude this phase of our campaign today because the debate over the ads is taking away from the pressing day-to-day work we need to do to help children and their families. They are and remain our first concern.

Our goal was to start a national dialogue. Now that we have the public's attention, we need your help. We would like to move forward and harness the energy that this campaign has generated to work together so that we do not lose one more day in the lives of these children. We hope you will partner with us to bring the issues surrounding child and adolescent mental health to the top of America's agenda. Work with us as we fight to give children and their families equal access to health insurance, remove the stigma that the term "psychiatric disorder" so clearly still elicits, and, most importantly, support the drive to make research and science-based treatment a national priority.

We invite all of you to continue this conversation online at a "town hall" meeting that we will hold early next year as we plan the next phase of our national public awareness campaign on child mental health. Look for details on our web site www.AboutOurKids.org.

Sincerely,

Harold S. Koplewicz, M.D.
Founder and Director, New York University Child Study Center



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