

**No. R-504. Joint resolution expressing concern over the *Reader's Digest* portrayal of mental illness.**

(J.R.H.38)

Offered by: Committee on Human Services

Whereas, the *Reader's Digest* has published a series of articles on the theme “Normal or Nuts,” most recently in March 2012, and

Whereas, the text of this latest article clearly intends to educate the public concerning the distinction between personal behaviors that may and may not require mental health intervention or support, and

Whereas, educating the public on mental health issues enables readers to assess episodes of personal behavior that they may find too embarrassing to discuss with others, and

Whereas, the articles’ flippant references to “nuts” in contrast to “normal” seems intended to attract public attention, and

Whereas, the March 2012 article contains illustrations and text that promote a negative view of mental illness by referring to persons with a symptom of mental illness as “nuts” and using the term “certifiable,” which carries the stigmatizing connotation that persons with a mental illness frequently require court-ordered involuntary treatment, and

Whereas, according to the World Health Organization, “mental illnesses (including depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia) account for nearly 25% of all disability across major industrialized countries,” and

Whereas, there is broad recognition by such national organizations as the National Alliance for Mental Illness that humorous references to the trauma of mental illness are detrimental to the goal of supporting those who may need psychiatric treatment, and

Whereas, the Vermont general assembly has heard testimony from groups such as the Vermont Psychiatric Survivors regarding the hurt experienced by those with a mental illness when the illness is minimized by derogatory comments, and

Whereas, as stated on the website of the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), “words have power to teach . . . to wound . . . to shape the way people think, feel, and act toward others . . . [and] when a stigmatized group of people, such as those with mental illnesses, is struggling for increased understanding and acceptance, attention to the language used in talking and writing about them is particularly important,” and

Whereas, SAMHSA has stated that “stigma impedes people from getting the care they need” and “is a pervasive barrier to understanding the gravity of mental illnesses,” and

Whereas, the state has striven to address the barriers preventing persons from receiving treatment through the enactment of Act 25 of 1997, which mandated that mental health treatment receive insurance coverage equal to other areas of health care, and

Whereas, in 2011, Act 24 provided for a study to “recommend guidelines for using respectful language when referring to people with disabilities” in order to eliminate in state law any negative terms used to describe individuals with a mental health condition, and

Whereas, this legislative body wishes to stand beside those persons who are hurt by negative portrayals of mental illness and to reinforce this state’s commitment as a national leader in the effort to establish equality for mental health as part of the robustness of our health care system, now therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly encourages the *Reader’s Digest* to consider the harm and pain that derogatory or flippant language regarding disabilities can cause to millions of Americans, and be it further

Resolved: That the General Assembly urges *Reader’s Digest* to reconsider the language used in its series titled “Are You Normal or Nuts?” in order that its public awareness efforts are not unintentionally hurtful, and be it further

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to Reader’s Digest Association President and Chief Executive Officer Robert E. Guth in New York.