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FAIR THAT WE PROVIDE THESE HEROIC WOMEN AND NATIONAL GUARD THAN EVER BEFORE, IT IS ONLY WHEN WE ARE ASKING MORE FROM OUR RESERVISTS THAT WE ARE BEING ASKED TO PROVIDE THEM WITH MORE THAN THEY CAN AFFORD TO PAY.

I WOULD ALSO HAVE VOTED "YES" ON ROLLCALL VOTE 522 AND 523.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. Speaker, James Hall exemplifies a life devoted to science and technological advancement. Through his hard work and dedication, James has worked to improve lives through scientific discoveries. For his many accomplishments, I am honored to pay tribute to Dr. James Hall here today.

Introduction for the Keeping Families Together Act

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK
OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, there is a tragedy going on across our country every day in which parents are being forced to turn over custody of their severely emotionally disturbed children to the state child welfare or juvenile justice system as their only means of obtaining desperately needed mental health services. These instances of child custody relinquishment happen when families are uninsured or have inadequate health insurance to pay for treatment of their child’s illness. Because this nation’s social safety net is not designed to help these families stay together, parents are being forced to turn their child over to the state in order to get the medical attention they so desperately need.

The “Keeping Families Together Act” which Senator COLLINS, Senator PRIYOR, Representatives RAMSTAD and Representative KENNEDY, and I are introducing today will help end this barbaric practice of child custody relinquishment.

The problem is widespread. In a report we requested, the U.S. General Accounting Office report found that parents placed over 12,700 children in 19 states and 30 counties into the child welfare system or juvenile justice system as their only means to assure that these children could receive vitally needed mental health services. The GAO report looked at a limited number of states and acknowledged that the number of families impacted nationwide is much higher. To add further credence to that finding, a recent survey conducted by the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) found that 25% of parents of children with serious emotional disturbance reported being advised to relinquish custody of their child in order to access needed mental health services.

According to another report by the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, the situations that cause parents and guardians to give up their seriously emotionally disturbed children to state agencies include the following:

The family has either exhausted their private health insurance benefits or their benefits do not cover required mental health services (e.g. Residential Treatment Program).

The family lives in a state or jurisdiction in which Medicaid services do not adequately address mental health needs and agency