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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

August 5, 2010

Mr. Bob Dudley
Chief Executive Officer
British Petroleum
501 Westlake Park Boulevard
Houston, TX 77079

Dear Mr. Dudley:

I am writing to urge that BP provide grants to Gulf Coast states and qualified organizations to support the coordinated delivery of mental health services to individuals and families impacted by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.

This disaster has wreaked havoc upon the lives of Gulf Coast residents. Fisheries closures throughout the region have disrupted the livelihood of thousands of people who depend upon the water to feed their families and keep their homes. They must now grapple with severe economic uncertainty and threats to self-identity and emotional well-being that result from watching their way of life disappear. In addition to the deckhands, truck drivers, waitresses, and seafood processors, scores of other laborers and small business owners are struggling with the impacts of decreased tourism and environmental damage. For many, this calamity will be the turning point in their lives. BP must be mindful of the psychological consequences of this disaster and provide resources to mitigate its toll upon the residents of the Gulf Coast, who are at severely increased risk of post traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, and alcohol and substance abuse. Recent reports of suicides and domestic violence linked to the spill underscore the need for immediate action.

A study released August 3rd by Columbia University's National Center for Domestic Preparedness in conjunction with the Children's Health Fund, revealed that 19.2% of the children surveyed in Louisiana and Mississippi were experiencing some form of mental distress. Another study released on July 29th by Ochsner Health System indicated that 30% of people interviewed in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida suffered from serious psychological distress, and that the rate of mental illness among residents of South Louisiana had doubled since July 2007. Both studies confirmed disproportionate impacts among the youngest and most financially vulnerable people in the affected communities.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Lisa Kaplowitz with the Department of Health and Human Services stated on June 15th that "states are reporting spreading anxieties, frustrations about the ongoing nature of the spill and its economic impact, and fears that more severe psychological and social issues will emerge. The State behavioral health agencies have also reported to us that they are anticipating that the longer-term stressors and economic consequences of this disaster could lead to an increase in depression, substance use and abuse, family violence, high-risk behavior, suicide, and even a resurgence of trauma symptoms from previous events."

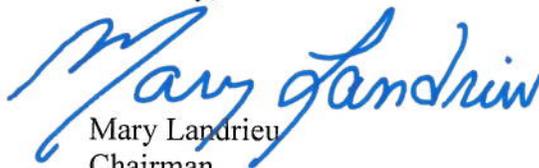
Studies conducted after the Exxon Valdez spill demonstrated the long-lasting psychological impact of this kind of technological disaster, particularly on those who rely on the ecosystem for their livelihoods, as many coastal families do. The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens Advisory Council wrote that "results of Exxon Valdez oil spill studies indicate that mental health impacts still persist 10 years post-spill. These impacts include disruption of family structure and unity, family violence, depression, alcoholism, drug abuse and psychological impairment." In addition, the Institute of Medicine identified mental health as its principal concern in this disaster during a recent meeting in New Orleans.

Addressing mental health needs is no less important than the removal of oil from marshlands and beaches or the compensation of people who have lost wages and income because of the spill. I was very disappointed to learn that BP denied the State of Louisiana's previous request for funding to support mental health services. The link between disasters and mental health impacts is clear, and as the Responsible Party for this manmade incident, BP has a moral and ethical responsibility to immediately tackle what is quickly emerging as a regional crisis.

My staff and I have met with officials from the National Incident Command, Integrated Services Team, Department of Health and Human Services, Catholic Charities, Louisiana State University Department of Psychiatry, Ochsner Health System, and the Children's Health Fund to discuss this important issue. I understand that the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has provided a template and technical support to Gulf Coast states in the development of comprehensive plans to address the emotional and psychological needs of people affected by the spill, and that Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida each submitted funding proposals to BP on July 30th for outreach, public education, prevention, mental health and substance abuse services through October 2011.

I strongly urge BP to review the states' proposals and award funding in an expedited manner to support their efforts to meet the mental health needs of the people impacted by this unfortunate disaster.

Sincerely,



Mary Landrieu
Chairman
Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery

Cc: Admiral Thad Allen, National Incident Commander, Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill
Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administrator Pamela S. Hyde, SAMSHA
Governor Haley Barbour
Governor Charlie Crist
Governor Bobby Jindal
Governor Bob Riley