

September 8, 2016

Dear Member of Congress:

The undersigned organizations—representing providers, professionals, patients, family members and consumers are united in support of strong implementation and enforcement of the parity protections in the landmark Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA). We write to urge you to enact mental health reform legislation with strong parity protections before Congress adjourns this year.

The Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act (H.R. 2646), passed by the House of Representatives on a near unanimous vote (422-2), and the Mental Health Reform Act (S. 2680), unanimously approved by the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP), both include provisions for better enforcement of the MHPAEA. These bicameral, bipartisan bills promote mental health and substance use parity by requiring better federal agency collaboration to enhance compliance through issuance of clarifying guidance, the reporting to Congress on federal parity investigations, and the development of an action plan to improve federal and state enforcement. In addition, the Government Accountability Office will study parity compliance by health plans covered by the law and clarify parity requirements for eating disorders.

Since the MHPAEA was enacted in 2008, insufficient state and federal enforcement, health plan non-compliance, including lack of disclosure of medical management information, and other implementation barriers to accessing mental health and substance use services on par with physical health services have stifled the full promise of the law for many Americans. The adoption of parity reforms in H.R. 2646 and S. 2680 is an important next step. If this legislation is coupled with state and federal implementation and oversight, including the randomized auditing process detailed in the Behavioral Health Transparency Act (H.R. 4276), the letter and spirit of the 2008 law will be realized and non-discriminatory access to treatment and recovery will ultimately become available.

We salute the bills' sponsors, cosponsors, HELP Committee Senators and all the Representatives who have already expressed by co-sponsorship and vote to move these important parity provisions closer to enactment through mental health reform legislation.

We also applaud the Administration for prioritizing mental health and substance use disorders parity implementation through the establishment and work of the Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Parity Task Force and urge issuance of strong parity implementation and enforcement action by October 30, 2016.

We now seek your full support to ensure mental health reform legislation is enacted this year, and that congressional attention continues on the parity enforcement and implementation effort in the future.

Sincerely,

The American Association on Health and Disability
The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
The American Psychological Association
The American Society of Addiction Medicine
BasicNeeds US

The Coalition For Whole Health
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Health Equity Leadership & Exchange Network
Human Services Research Institute
The Kennedy Center for Mental Health Policy & Research
The Kennedy Forum
Legal Action Center
Margaret Clark Morgan Foundation
Mental Health America
Morehouse School of Medicine
The National Alliance on Mental Illness
The National Assn for Rural Mental Health
The National Assn of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse
The National Council for Behavioral Health
Netsmart
ParityTrack
The Parity Implementation Coalition
The Satcher Health Leadership Institute at Morehouse School of Medicine
Shatterproof
The Thomas Scattergood Behavioral Health Foundation
Treatment Research Institute

Regional Organizations:

Anne Arundel County Mental Health Agency
Association of Oregon Community Mental Health Programs
California Institute for Behavioral Health Solutions
Center for Health Care Services, San Antonio TX
Children with Special Health Care Needs (Utah)
The Colorado Coalition for Parity
Health Law Advocates (Massachusetts)
Illinois Association for Behavioral Health
Illinois Consortium on Drug Policy at Roosevelt University
Johnson County Mental Health Center
The Lakeshore Foundation
Mental Health Association of San Francisco
The New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc.
Salt Lake County Behavioral Health Services
State Representative Lou Lang (Illinois-16)
Thresholds (Illinois)