



Sent: Sunday, February 25, 2007

Subject: **BCD Urgent Action Alert**

Mental Health Parity-You Can Make It Happen!!!

The Mental Health Parity Act (S.558) is very close to being passed in Congress, after five straight years of defeat. You can help make the difference, if you feel that this Act is worth supporting. We at the Center for Clinical Social Work (ABE) endorse it, as does the Mental Health Liaison Group-a national advocacy and policy consortium-and many others who have been working toward passage of a Parity Act for years.

Senators Pete Dominici (R-MN), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), and Michael Enzi (R-WY) introduced the bill. Under its provisions, group-health plans that cover more than 50 employees, and that offer mental health benefits of any sort, must provide full parity for mental health coverage as well as physical health coverage. The bill does not require that a group plan offer mental health benefits. The mental-health parity bill (the first one with a chance of passing since 1996) creates full parity for annual and lifetime dollar limits, hospital days, outpatient visits, co-pays, deductibles and out-of-pocket expenses.

Taking Action: Time is of the essence! If you'd like to see this legislation enacted, contact your Senators at http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm and urge them to co-sponsor the bill. Send them a letter (sample below) or make a toll-free phone call (instructions below). Maybe your Senators are already co-sponsors, in which case you might want to thank them (as below).

Whatever your decision, we hope that you appreciate having had a chance to know about the bill, its terms, and how to go about contacting your Senators. The full bill may be viewed at <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c110:S.558> As we at the Center for Clinical Social Work become more involved in advocating for clinical social workers and their clients, we will send you alerts, from time to time, about important issues in which we think you might want to take a stand.

Sample Letter:

The Honorable [full name]
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [last name]:

I am writing to ask you to co-sponsor and support S. 558, the Mental Health Parity Act of 2007, introduced by Senators Domenici, Kennedy and Enzi. This bipartisan bill can make a real

difference for patients, many of whom now face high co-insurance and strict limits on the days of care to help them with mental problems and disorders.

Mental health disorders are the second-leading cause of disability and premature death in the United States. However, many families with "good health coverage" discover that their loved ones cannot get the care they need, because employer-provided health insurance sets one-size-fits-all limits on mental health benefits, even though it imposes no such limits on other medical and surgical benefits.

These barriers to medically necessary mental health treatment inflict enormous harm on American families...and on our economy. These discriminatory practices often cause mental health disorders to go untreated and become worse. Tragically, this lack of care leads all too often to unemployment, broken homes, school failure, and even suicide. Untreated mental health disorders also cost our economy about \$80 billion each year in lost productivity, sick leave, and unemployment.

This legislation, approved by the HELP Committee on Feb. 14, would require parity between mental health benefits and benefits for treating any other illness or injury. It will save lives and families. The costs of not enacting parity are high, and have fallen most heavily on taxpayer-funded public programs, our economy, and the well-being of American families and their communities.

Please cosponsor and support S. 558. Thank you for consideration of my concerns and those of millions of others.

Sincerely,

(name)

Telephone Action: You can also use the toll-free Parity Hotline, 1-866-parity4 (1-866-727-4894), to call your Senators to urge co-sponsorship of the mental health parity legislation (The Parity Hotline reaches the Capitol switchboard, which can connect callers to their Senators). Be forewarned that this hotline may have lots of action, and you may be put on hold.

Message:

Message for Non-Cosponsors: "I am calling to ask that the Senator cosponsor the Mental Health Parity Act, S. 558. Parity is a just and affordable solution to insurance discrimination that will save lives and families."

Message for Co-sponsors: "I am calling to thank the Senator for having cosponsored the Mental Health Parity Act, S. 558."

Cosponsor list: Cosponsor list: Domenici, Pete V. [NM] plus

Sen Akaka, Daniel K. [HI] - 2/12/2007

Sen Alexander, Lamar [TN] - 2/14/2007

Sen Biden, Joseph R., Jr. [DE] - 2/12/2007
Sen Boxer, Barbara [CA] - 2/12/2007
Sen Cantwell, Maria [WA] - 2/12/2007
2/12/2007
Sen Clinton, Hillary Rodham [NY] - 2/15/2007
Sen Collins, Susan M. [ME] - 2/12/2007
Sen Durbin, Richard [IL] - 2/15/2007
Sen Feingold, Russell D. [WI] - 2/12/2007
Sen Harkin, Tom [IA] - 2/15/2007
Sen Inouye, Daniel K. [HI] - 2/15/2007
Sen Klobuchar, Amy [MN] - 2/15/2007
2/12/2007
Sen McCaskill, Claire [MO] - 2/14/2007
Sen Nelson, E. Benjamin [NE] - 2/12/2007
Sen Salazar, Ken [CO] - 2/13/2007
Sen Snowe, Olympia J. [ME] - 2/12/2007
Sen Warner, John [VA] - 2/12/2007

Sen Bingaman, Jeff [NM] - 2/14/2007
Sen Brown, Sherrod [OH] - 2/12/2007
Sen Cardin, Benjamin L. [MD] -
Sen Coleman, Norm [MN] - 2/12/2007
Sen Conrad, Kent [ND] - 2/15/2007
Sen Enzi, Michael B. [WY] - 2/12/2007
Sen Graham, Lindsey [SC] - 2/12/2007
Sen Hatch, Orrin G. [UT] - 2/12/2007
Sen Kennedy, Edward M. [MA] - 2/12/2007
Sen Lautenberg, Frank R. [NJ] -
Sen Murkowski, Lisa [AK] - 2/12/2007
Sen Roberts, Pat [KS] - 2/12/2007
Sen Smith, Gordon H. [OR] - 2/12/2007
Sen Stabenow, Debbie [MI] - 2/12/2007

Resources: Fact sheets on parity, and the roster of over 100 organizations backing S. 558, may be found at <http://www.mhlg.org/page18.html>.