



Legislative Alert: Urge Congress to Act This Year to Pass Strong Parity Legislation

A key legislative goal for the American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA) continues to be the enactment of legislation to end insurance discrimination for the treatment of mental health and substance abuse disorders.

The 110th Congress has fewer than five legislative weeks remaining to complete its work if it adjourns as planned for the upcoming presidential and congressional elections. This short time frame leaves limited time for final action on mental health and substance abuse parity legislation.

AMHCA needs your help to keep the heat on Congress to enact this historic legislation. The American public supports ending insurance discrimination, and it is time for Congress to ensure that those who need services can receive them. For far too many years, we have heard promises of action, and now Congress is poised to make mental health and substance abuse parity a reality.

Because of the grassroots efforts of AMHCA and the advocacy of allies across the country, the House of Representatives took a historic step in passing H.R. 1424, the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act, on March 5, 2008. Reps. Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) and Jim Ramstad (R-MN) shared their stories of recovery and led the successful, bipartisan effort to secure passage of the bill, which passed by a vote of 268 to 148. On September 18, 2007, the U.S. Senate passed S. 558, the Mental Health Parity Act, by unanimous consent.

House and Senate negotiators will soon begin efforts to reconcile differences between the two bills passed by each chamber.

What you can do: AMHCA encourages its members and others interested in this issue to call their two Senators and Representative and ask them to support enactment of mental health and substance abuse parity legislation this year.

The U.S. Capitol Switchboard can be reached by calling 202-224-3121 and can connect you to your Senators and Representative's offices. If you do not know the name of your elected officials, go to www.congress.org and enter your zip code in the upper right hand corner. Please be sure to leave your name and address with the staff member to make it clear that you are a constituent.

Suggested Message for your Senators and Representative: "As a constituent and a Licensed Professional Counselor (or your specific state title), I'm calling to express my strong support for the enactment of mental health and substance abuse parity legislation this year. Now that the House and Senate have passed their bills, millions of Americans are depending on the 110th Congress to put aside their differences and reach a bipartisan agreement. Please work with your colleagues to ensure that a strong mental health and substance abuse parity bill is sent to the President for his signature."

Thank you for making calls these advocacy calls on this important issue. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Beth Powell of the American Mental Health Counselors Association at 1-800-326-2642 x105.