

## ACTION ALERT

### Ask your Members of Congress to Co-Sponsor Mental Health Parity Legislation We Need More Cosponsors for Parity Bills (S. 486/H.R. 953)

#### Parity Introduction

In the fight to establish mental health parity, congressional leaders introduced the Senator Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act of 2003 on February 27, 2003. The bills' sponsors, Sens. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., and Reps. Jim Ramstad, R-Minn., and Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I., dedicated the renewed battle for parity to the late senator, a tireless champion of insurance parity and other mental health legislation.

The new parity bills, designated as S. 486 and H.R. 953, mirror the parity legislation in the previous Congress (S. 543/H.R. 4066). Currently, there are 62 co-sponsors of S. 486 and 235 co-sponsors of H.R. 953.

#### Parity Cosponsorship

Check on the Thomas legislative Web site, <http://thomas.loc.gov/> to see if your Members of Congress are cosponsors of S. 486 or H.R. 953. Unsure who your Members of Congress are? Go to <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/dbq/officials/> and enter your zip code.

If your Members are not already cosponsors, urge them to become cosponsors of this legislation. Remind them of the importance of mental health parity – in order to ban insurance discrimination against people with mental disorders.

#### Background

The Senator Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act of 2003 is intended to close gaps in the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996. Employers have exploited loopholes in the 1996 law by substituting new restrictions on mental health benefits for those the bill outlawed. Over 250 national organizations support enactment of this legislation, and last year President Bush urged Congress to pass mental health parity legislation.

#### Action:

Please contact your senators and representative by calling the Parity Hotline\* (1-866-parity4; 1-866-727-4894) to reach the Capitol Switchboard, which will connect to you to your members' congressional offices.

Message: (ask for the "Health LA" [legislative assistant]):

To Senators: "I'm calling to urge the senator to cosponsor the Domenici-Kennedy mental health parity bill (S. 486). Here in \_\_\_\_\_ [state], we believe it's vital to pass this legislation to end health insurance discrimination against people with mental disorders."

To Representatives: "I'm calling to urge the representative to cosponsor the Ramstad-Kennedy mental health parity bill (H.R. 953). Here in \_\_\_\_\_ [town] we believe it's vital to pass this legislation to end health insurance discrimination against people who have mental disorders."

To cosponsors of S. 486 or H.R. 953: "I'm calling to thank you for supporting S. 486 [or H.R. 953]. This legislation is critical to my family and me. I urge you to weigh in with your leadership and the Bush Administration to ensure that mental health parity is enacted as soon as possible."

*\* The Parity Hotline is sponsored by the National Mental Health Association.*

### **Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly Policy:**

The 213th General Assembly (2001) of the PC(USA) called for Parity of Mental Health Benefits in a statement, "On Advocating Passage of Legislation Requiring Health Insurance Plans to Provide Mental Health Benefits in Full Parity with Medical and Surgical Benefits." They called for the following actions:

1. Direct the Office of the Stated Clerk to advocate for the passage of legislation in the eighteen states lacking requirements that health insurance plans provide full coverage for mental health benefits and that such coverage be in full parity with benefits for other illnesses.
2. Direct the Office of the Stated Clerk to advocate for the passage of the federal Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act (S.796) cosponsored by Senators Pete Domenici (R-NM) and Paul Wellstone (D-MN).
3. Urge the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to evaluate, on an annual basis, issues of parity between coverage for mental health and medical and surgical benefits under plans offered by the Board of Pensions and include their evaluation in their annual reports to future General Assemblies. (2001 Statement -- PC(USA), pp.419-421)

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