

Chairman Dingell at the Full Committee markup of H.R. 1424, the "Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act of 2007," and H.R. 1236

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE MARKUP ON H.R. 1236, TO AUTHORIZE THE U.S. POSTAL SERVICE TO ISSUE A SPECIAL POSTAGE STAMP TO SUPPORT BREAST CANCER RESEARCH, AND H.R. 1424, THE "PAUL WELLSTONE MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION EQUITY ACT OF 2007"
October 16, 2007

Today the Committee considers two public health bills. The first bill, H.R. 1236, will authorize the U.S. Postal Service to issue a postage stamp to support breast cancer research. I urge my colleagues to support this bill, as it will provide millions of dollars for research, while raising public awareness of this disease.

I am also pleased the Committee is considering legislation to provide parity in health insurance for mental health and substance abuse disorders. This legislation, H.R. 1424, is named in memory of the late Senator Paul Wellstone, who was unwavering in his commitment to end the discrimination against those with diseases of the mind.

Our colleagues in the House, Reps. Patrick Kennedy and Jim Ramstad, have introduced this bill, which enjoys bipartisan support, including 272 cosponsors. It will make great strides in protecting patients, and the amendment adopted in Subcommittee improves the bill further.

Some argue that the House should simply adopt the Senate bill, which that body passed by unanimous consent last month. In my experience, however, unanimous consent from the other body often recommends greater scrutiny on this side of the Capitol. Stated plainly, the Senate-passed legislation is inadequate for the task at hand.

The House bill has four important elements that would contribute to ending insurance discrimination of those with mental health or substance abuse disorders:

• It clarifies which benefits insurance companies should cover, addressing some egregious examples of prejudice experienced against those with mental illnesses;

• It addresses the use of medical management for insurers so that specific coverage is not arbitrary in its application and more transparent to the patient;

• It provides that out-of-network care for mental health and substance abuse is available, as is now the case for medical and surgical benefits;

• And lastly, this bill establishes clear Federal expectations for insurance companies that provide mental health and substance abuse benefits, while preserving State laws that have more protective standards.

These provisions are not contained in the Senate-passed legislation, and without them, true parity will not be achieved.

I commend Subcommittee Chairman Pallone for his leadership in bringing H.R. 1424 to the full Committee. I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation and look forward to its enactment.

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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