

Dingell Statement on Mental Health Parity

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

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March 5, 2008

Washington, DC – Rep. John D. Dingell (D-MI), Chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, today submitted the following statement for the Congressional record in support of the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act.

Today we are voting on the passage of H.R. 1424, the “Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act of 2007,” which will permanently reauthorize and improve the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996. I commend my distinguished colleagues, Representatives Kennedy and Ramstad, for their efforts in crafting this important piece of legislation.

H.R. 1424 will create true parity of coverage for mental health and substance abuse disorders. It will ensure that healthcare plans that provide mental health coverage do not charge higher co-payments, coinsurance, or deductibles for mental health or substance abuse care. It will also ensure that care for mental health and addiction disorders is no more restrictive than medical or surgical care.

Mental illness and addiction disorders have long been recognized by the healthcare community as actual and legitimate health afflictions which may have a significant affect on an individual’s life and well-being. It has long been accepted that these afflictions deserve treatment by professionally trained healthcare providers.

As I think of all of the different diseases and afflictions recognized by our scientific and healthcare communities, I struggle to find a reason why someone who has healthcare coverage should confront discriminatory barriers to treatment simply because of the nature of the disease. Mental health and addiction disorders can be just as painful and debilitating as medical and surgical disorders. The strains of these illnesses affect individuals, families, and society as a whole.

I urge my colleagues to vote to pass H.R. 1424 to achieve comprehensive mental health and substance abuse parity.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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