

HOUSE APPROVES MENTAL HEALTH PARITY LEGISLATION (06-30-08)

Salvatore F.Dimasi

Contact: Jake Lambert (617) 722-2060

June 30, 2008

HOUSE APPROVES MENTAL HEALTH PARITY LEGISLATION

Bill will expand health insurance coverage to include mental health services

BOSTON –The House of Representatives today overwhelmingly voted to pass landmark mental health parity legislation that will require health plans to cover mental health and substance abuse disorders to the same extent as all other medical conditions.

"Extending health insurance benefits to the mentally ill will be a big step forward for healthcare reform in Massachusetts. Now our law will serve to cover the physical and psychological well-being of our residents," said House Speaker Salvatore F. DiMasi (D-Boston).

Representative Ruth B. Balser (D-Newton), lead sponsor of the legislation and Chair of the House Mental Health and Substance Abuse Committee remarked, "This is both health reform legislation and civil rights legislation. It will increase access to care to all those who suffer from mental illness and addictions. It will also, once and for all, remove the stigma associated with these conditions."

The bill is the next step in health care reform. Not only will all Massachusetts residents be required to have insurance coverage, but this legislation ensures that the coverage is comprehensive, giving full coverage for mental illness and addictions.

This bill seeks to complete what the Legislature began in 2000 when it passed legislation that expanded health insurance coverage of mental health services, but it stopped short of full parity by granting parity to a limited number of so-called "biologically based disorders" while setting limits on coverage of all other mental disorders. Examples of disorders that were not fully covered by the earlier statute are eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance abuse disorders.

The biological distinction is contradicted by a growing body of research which attributes many presumed "non-biologically based disorders," such as eating disorders or addictions, to biological factors. More importantly, the need for treatment exists regardless of the source of the illness. A battered wife or a veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder needs treatment regardless of whether or not there is a biological basis for the illness. The legislation closes this loophole by requiring coverage for any disorder identified by the American Psychiatric Association in their diagnostic manual, the DSM.

###

[SHNS Home Page](#)