

Judge David L.

BAZELON CENTER
for Mental Health Law

ACTION ALERT

Mental Health Advocates Hail House Parity Vote

Opposition to Health Insurance Discrimination Resonates

March 5, 2008—The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, the leading national legal-advocacy organization representing people with mental disabilities, hails passage today by the U.S. House of Representatives of bipartisan legislation to provide full parity for mental health and addiction services in private insurance policies.

“Today’s historic vote takes the next big step toward ending discrimination against people with mental disorders” said Bazelon Center executive director Robert Bernstein. He commended Representatives Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) and Jim Ramstad (R-MN), the original sponsors of The Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act (H.R. 1424), “for their persistence in garnering support for this legislation, both in the House and through the hearings they staged across the nation.”

The vote signaled strong opposition to the discriminatory limits on mental health and addiction treatment, compared to general medical/surgical services, which now create significant barriers to treatment. The legislation bars health insurance plans from imposing day and visit limits or applying different deductibles, co-payments, out-of-network charges and other financial requirements for mental health or addiction treatment.

“The lack of access currently created by inequities in private health insurance policies plays a significant role in America’s unmet-need gap,” said Bernstein. “With their mental health disorders left untreated, hundreds of thousands of children and adults face a host of adverse consequences, including school failure, increased work absenteeism, involvement with the criminal and juvenile justice system and even suicide.”

H.R. 1424 will now be reconciled with the Senate’s Mental Health Parity Act of 2007 (S. 558). “The Bazelon Center calls on members of both houses to quickly forge a meaningful compromise,” said Laurel Stine, Bazelon Center director of federal relations, “so that the benefits of parity can be realized by children and adults requiring mental health and addiction treatment this year. The time is now to end health insurance discrimination!