

## Legislation Update: Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act of 2007

The “Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act” (HR 1424) proposes full parity in health insurance plans and will help reduce stigma and promote accessibility to mental health treatment. The act was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives on March 5, 2008 with a 268 to 148 vote for the legislation. It was originally introduced on March 9, 2007 and is sponsored by Representatives Patrick Kennedy (D, R.I.), who has been treated for depression and substance abuse and Jim Ramstad (R- Minn.) who has undergone treatment for alcoholism. This long awaited measure expands on the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996 by requiring *equal* health insurance coverage for mental and physical health services if the policy states that it covers both. The previous act pursued only partial parity for mental health services and still permitted inequity between mental and medical services covered. The bill holds the name of the late Democratic senator, Paul Wellstone, who was a fervent believer in improving mental health care in the U.S. His son, David Wellstone has championed the cause since his father’s death in 2002.

A similar version of the bill was passed in the U.S Senate unanimously on September 18, 2007. The House measure requires insurance companies to cover all mental disorders listed in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders; however the Senate measure is more lenient. The next step will be for a committee comprised of members from the Senate and House to convene to discuss differences in the two pieces of legislation.

If passed, the legislation would potentially help address funding challenges for school mental health by enhancing insurance reimbursement for treatment services.

Sources:

[http://chadd.informz.net/chadd/archives/archive\\_271276.html](http://chadd.informz.net/chadd/archives/archive_271276.html)

[http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/MENTAL\\_HEALTH\\_CONGRESS?SITE=KYB66&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/MENTAL_HEALTH_CONGRESS?SITE=KYB66&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT)

<http://www.opencongress.org/bill/110-h1424/show>

[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/06/washington/06health.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/06/washington/06health.html?_r=1&oref=slogin)

\*The *Legislation Update* was developed by Kerri Stiegler from the Center for School Mental Health (CSMH). The CSMH is funded by the Office of Adolescent Health, Maternal, and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services (Project # U45 MC00174).