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MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the Senate

FROM: Sarah Diedrick-Kasdorf, Senior Legislative Associate

DATE: January 27, 2009

SUBJECT: Support for Senate Bill 362

The Wisconsin Counties Association urges you to vote in favor of Senate Bill 362, relating to health insurance coverage or nervous and mental disorders, alcoholism and other drug abuse problems.

The lack of parity for mental and substance abuse disorders places a large strain on the public mental health system. Based on figures reported to the state by county human services departments (Human Services Revenue Report), the largest percentage of county revenue (primarily property tax levy) allocated to human services programs, otherwise known as community aids overmatch, is spent on mental health and alcohol and other drug abuse services - approximately \$141.9 million in 2007. With our declining economy and decreasing state support for human services, counties can no longer afford to provide the same level of mental health services to individuals accessing the public mental health system as were provided even a few years ago. Counties have reduced psychotherapist positions, psychiatric services and staff in community mental health programs, and have eliminated prevention/early intervention services. This results in waiting lists for services which ultimately leads to high-cost inpatient hospitalizations.

In addition to the strain of county human services departments, county jails are experiencing increased offender populations with mental health and/or substance abuse disorders. The county jail is not the proper venue, and cannot provide appropriate treatment services, for individuals suffering from mental health and/or substance abuse disorders.

Wisconsin needs to treat mental illness and addiction disorders on a level playing field with physical illness. The Wisconsin Counties Association strongly urges you to support Senate Bill 362, providing mental health parity in Wisconsin.

Thank you for considering our comments.