



Wisconsin Council on Mental Health

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December 16, 2009

To: The Honorable Jon Richards
The Honorable Chuck Benedict
The Honorable Penny Bernard Schaber
The Honorable Sandy Pasch
The Honorable Kelda Helen Roys
The Honorable Amy Sue Vruwink
The Honorable Donna Seidel
The Honorable Jennifer Shilling
The Honorable John Nygren
The Honorable Kitty Rhoades
The Honorable Jeff Stone
The Honorable Pat Strachota
The Honorable Leah Vukmir

Dear Members of the Assembly Committee on Health and Healthcare Reform:

The Wisconsin Council on Mental Health (WCMH) would like to take this opportunity to express their strong support for Wisconsin's Mental Health and Substance Abuse Parity Act (SB-362/AB-512).

WCMH has long supported parity legislation due to significant concerns about the lack of access to affordable mental health and substance abuse (MH/SA) services for people living in Wisconsin. Passage of the federal legislation (Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008) went a long way towards addressing this concern but has still left many Wisconsin residents without equitable mental health and addiction treatment coverage.

The passage of this state law will create parity for coverage of MH/SA services for to up to 700,000 additional people in Wisconsin. These individuals, when covered with adequate MH/SA insurance, will regain control of their lives and become more self reliant, thus contributing to the economic recovery of Wisconsin.

Studies of the implementation of parity in other states have consistently found that comprehensive coverage of MH/SA services adds a relatively small initial increase in the cost of health care and that lack of MH/SA coverage can lead to a more significant increase in primary health care costs later, as individuals with MH/SA issues have a higher rates of co-morbid physical illnesses and a mortality rate that is 25 percent higher than the general population (National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, 2009). The Wisconsin Council on Mental Health membership believe this legislation will not only benefit consumers of MH/SA services, but also benefit their families, communities, and all Wisconsin residents.

Sincerely,



Jackie Baldwin, Chair
Wisconsin Council on Mental Health

Cc: Karen Timberlake, Secretary, Department of Health Services
Wisconsin Council on Mental Health membership

bcc: John Easterday, Administrator, Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse
Services
Joyce Allen, Director, Bureau of Prevention Treatment and Recovery
Melanie Foxcroft, Council staff
Dan Zimmerman, Council Legislative and Policy Committee staff
Peg Algar, Mental Health Block Grant Planne