



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

July 9, 2012

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Hilda Solis
Secretary
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20210

The Honorable Timothy Geithner
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretaries Sebelius, Geithner, and Solis:

As co-chair of the Congressional Mental Health Caucus, I respectfully write to request that the administration issue the final rule for the **Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA)** to facilitate its proper implementation and enforcement. Without this final rule critical to the enforcement of MHPAEA, we can anticipate the current breaches in compliance of the law to continue or worsen.

The MHPAEA plays a critical role in allowing for those suffering from mental illness and addictive disorders to **have access to the benefits** listed within the Affordable Care Act. Mental health parity is essential to the overall health and well-being of every American, regardless of race, gender, financial status, or age. We cannot afford to ignore this illness, as it is one that does not discriminate. We must all continue working together to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness through proper education. Most importantly, we must remove the barriers and provide necessary and adequate access to mental health and addiction recovery services.

Current statistics reveal that one out of every five Americans will suffer from some type of mental illness at least once in their lifetime. Business suffers loss of 1.3 billion days of work, bringing cost to U.S. employers of \$44 billion annually, plus affecting our economy at

approximately \$150 billion annually, while chemical addiction costs the U.S. more than \$400 billion annually.

Most importantly, access to mental health services is critical for our returning Iraq and Afghanistan military service members. It is our moral responsibility to meet their health needs, since we put them in harm's way to defend and protect our beloved nation. Sadly, we hear that eighteen Veterans die by suicide everyday. In a letter sent to you on July 8, 2011 by my former colleagues, Representative Jim Ramstad and Representative Patrick Kennedy, they state that, "over 70% of National Guardsmen and Reservists access care in the private sector." Implementation and enforcement of the regulations in MHPAEA ensure that our returning service members receiving mental health treatment through the public sector get adequate and equal coverage needed to address their mental health needs.

This law and final rule ensures mental health and addiction treatment are provided the same coverage and equal attention to treatment as other medical illnesses and conditions, such as diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, and other physical illnesses. Discriminatory provisions affecting Americans with mental health and addiction disorders will begin to be eliminated. Mental illness is a true, but hidden economic issue for our country, which we must not ignore as it affects our national quality of life as well. Mental health must be elevated as a critical issue affecting our country and recognized equally to other health conditions and illnesses.

Implementation of the final rule for the **Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act**, will ensure that no man, woman, or child suffers in silence due to mental illness or an addictive disorder. This will also go a long way in addressing the stigma. I support every effort that will establish long overdue equal access to mental health and addiction recovery services.

Please, I urge you to issue this final rule promptly in order to allow consumers and other stakeholders a guarantee that health plans are complying with MHPAEA, and to hold these plans accountable. Those in need of these critical services should not have to wait one more day. Any additional information or assistance can be provided by Ane Romero in my office at ane.romero@mail.house.gov or (202) 225-5256.

Sincerely,



Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress
Congressional Mental Health Caucus, Co-chair