

## Chris Murphy Calls for Passage of Mental Health Parity Legislation

Today, Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) participated in a press conference led by Patrick J. Kennedy (D-RI) and Jim Ramstad (R-MN) to draw attention to Mental Health Month and call for passage of mental health parity legislation, "The Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act".

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) participated in a press conference led by Patrick J. Kennedy (D-RI) and Jim Ramstad (R-MN) to draw attention to Mental Health Month and call for passage of mental health parity legislation, "The Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act". At the event in Washington, D.C., the Members were joined by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and the entire Democratic leadership. Kennedy and Ramstad presented a report to the Speaker with findings of field hearings conducted across the country on mental health parity.

"I am proud to stand here today with Speaker Pelosi and Congressmen Kennedy and Ramstad as we continue to press for increased access to mental and chemical addiction health care. Families who deal with mental illness and chemical addiction should not feel like they have to hide in a closet any longer. We can treat mental illness with the same level of coverage as we would treat a broken leg," said Murphy.

The State of Connecticut has been a leader on this issue; since 1999, it has had one of the strongest laws in the country, bringing coverage for mental health to the same level as other medical needs for many residents. However, this pressing issue must be addressed nationwide, as more than 57 million Americans suffer from mental illness and 26 million are afflicted with chemical addiction. And many Connecticut residents are covered by health insurance plans that do not fall under the state mental health parity law, as their plans are financed by companies headquartered out of state.

In March, Murphy and a bipartisan group of 254 of his colleagues led by Congressmen Kennedy and Ramstad introduced landmark legislation to eliminate disparities in health coverage for mental healthcare. The bill, named after the former Senator who championed this cause before his death, will eliminate disparities in health coverage, while at the same time providing safeguards for employers. Today, it has 266 cosponsors.

This legislation ensures mental health and addiction benefits are no more restrictive or costly than the financial requirements or treatment limitations applied to medical and surgical benefits. The bill also guarantees that plans cover the same range of mental illnesses and addiction disorders offered by the federal employee health plan that Members of Congress use. Finally, it excludes from coverage requirements businesses of less than 50 employees and those that experience an overall premium increase of 2 percent or more in the first year and 1 percent in subsequent years.

"This bill is a responsible approach to removing the stigma associated with these health issues, and improving access to quality health care for millions of Americans," said Murphy.

Similar legislation gained bipartisan majorities in the past three Congresses, but was not brought to the floor for a vote.

Following the press conference, Murphy and other Members participated in a "parity operations center" set up to coordinate and mobilize support for the legislation. Murphy called a hospital administrator at The William W. Backus Hospital in Norwich, the executive director of Prime Time House in Torrington, and a doctor with the State's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. At the operations center, informational materials were available, interviews were conducted, calls were made by Members to community leaders in their district and advocates visiting Capitol Hill for Mental Health Month had an opportunity to network, all in an effort to pass the most comprehensive and responsible bill improving mental health and addiction treatment.

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