

Coalition for Fairness in Mental Illness Coverage

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FAIRNESS COALITION LAUDS REPUBLICAN, DEMOCRATIC PLANKS SUPPORTING PARITY

Today the Coalition for Fairness in Mental Illness Coverage praised the Republican and Democratic parties for statements in their platforms in support of "mental health parity," the principle that mental and physical illnesses should be treated equally by providers of health insurance coverage. The Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act (S. 486/H.R. 953), which is now before Congress, would enshrine that principle into law.

"We commend the Republicans and Democrats for including in their platforms unequivocal statements of support for the equitable treatment of mental illnesses," said the nine-member Fairness Coalition, noting that the legislation has 69 Senate cosponsors and 247 House cosponsors. "There is strong, bipartisan support in the Congress for the Wellstone bill. We urge the Congress to make the policy statements of both parties a reality by enacting the Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act."

The Republican platform, which was adopted Aug. 30 as part of the party's convention in New York, read: "We applaud President Bush for supporting treatment of mental illness. Mental and physical illness should be treated equitably and fairly."

The Democratic platform, adopted in July, said: "We are committed to passing the Wellstone mental health parity legislation, ending discrimination against Americans with mental illnesses, and ensuring equal treatment for mental illness in our health system."

In the U.S. Senate, MHETA was introduced by Sens. Pete Domenici (R-N.M.) and Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.). In the House, Reps. Jim Ramstad (R-Minn.) and Patrick Kennedy (D-R.I.) introduced the bill. In addition, President Bush called on Congress in April 2002 to enact mental health parity legislation for him to sign into law. Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry has said that, as president, he would sign parity legislation to help tear down discrimination and stigma against people with mental illnesses.

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The Coalition for Fairness in Mental Illness Coverage represents consumers, family members, health professionals, health care systems, and administrators. The Coalition's members are: the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the National Mental Health Association, the American Hospital Association, the American Managed Behavioral Healthcare Association, the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the Federation of American Hospitals, and the National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems.

Mental illness coverage. It's time to be fair by treating it equally in health care.

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