

**Media Advisory: Parity Now! Rally on the U.S. Capitol June 6th
In Support of Mental Health Parity Legislation**

WASHINGTON, DC -- On **Thursday June 6th at 12:00 p.m.**, U.S. Senators Pete Domenici (R-NM) and Paul Wellstone (D-MN) and Representatives Marge Roukema (R-NJ) and Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) will join supporters of mental health parity legislation and those who have been directly affected by the lack of mental health parity on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol, to help rally Congress to pass the Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 44.3 million Americans suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder. Additionally, untreated mental health disorders create huge costs for business and the economy. The U.S. Surgeon General's 1999 Report on Mental Health also found that lost productivity and absenteeism due to untreated mental health disorders cost American businesses \$70 billion annually.

Unfortunately many health insurance providers treat mental illnesses differently than physical illnesses by placing caps on treatment or reimbursing at rates lower than they would for physical illnesses. On April 29th, in New Mexico, President George W. Bush made a commitment to end such discrimination by calling for mental health parity legislation to be passed this year. The Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act (S.543/H.R.4066) has 66 Senate cosponsors and over 200 cosponsors in the House of Representatives.

Despite these facts, and despite the fact that the Congressional Budget Office has found that providing full parity would raise current health insurance premiums by less than one percent, the Congress has still been unable to put mental health parity legislation on the President's desk.

The Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act, modeled after parity requirements for the Federal Employee Health Benefits Plan (FEHBP), aims to fix this form of discrimination. The legislation requires group health plans that provide mental health benefits to do so without arbitrary limits that differ from limits on medical/surgical care. This is the same health care coverage currently available to Members of Congress, federal employees and their families.

The rally is being sponsored by Mental Health Liaison Group on behalf of the 186 national organizations that support the Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act.

WHO: Sponsors of the Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act: U.S. Senators Pete Domenici (R-NM), Paul Wellstone (D-MN), Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Arlen Specter (R-PA), Representatives Marge Roukema (R-NJ) and Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), and supporters of mental health parity legislation

WHAT: Parity Now! Rally on the Capitol for mental health parity legislation

WHEN: **Thursday, June 6, 2002**
12:00 p.m.

WHERE: U.S. Capitol
West Lawn
(Rain Location: Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 419)

*Speakers will be available to members of the press behind the staging area –
Immediately following the rally.*

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