

Mental Health

Liaison Group

September 30, 1999

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker of the House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6501

Dear Speaker Hastert:

With the full House nearing a debate on patient protection legislation, the undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) are writing to urge that you not take up extraneous matters that will jeopardize serious consideration of managed care measures this year. In particular, the MHLG would strongly object to a rule permitting consideration of the Small Business Access and Choice for Entrepreneurs Act (H.R. 2047) or related legislation authorizing Association Health Plans and easing current restrictions on Medical Savings Accounts (MSAs).

The mental health community applauds efforts to expand the availability of private health insurance in the United States. However, we vigorously oppose Association Health Plans (AHPs), as well as HealthMarts, because these proposals preempt virtually all state health care laws for employers that participate in such arrangements.

Due to the widespread societal discrimination faced by children and adults with mental illnesses, clinicians, consumers, family members and volunteers have worked together in state capitals across America to level the playing field and improve the availability and quality of mental health care. These efforts have borne considerable fruit. To date, an estimated thirty (30) states have passed laws which require insurance plans to offer mental health benefits, or specify minimum mental health benefits coverage. Similarly, in a bipartisan fashion, twenty-six (26) states have passed some form of parity legislation ending discriminatory insurance practices imposed against people with mental disorders. In 1999 alone, Gov. John Rowland (R-CT), Gov. Marc Racicot (R-MT), Gov. Mike Johanns (R-NE), Gov. Christine Todd Whitman (R-NJ), Gov. Frank Keating (R-OK), and Gov. James Gilmore (R-VA) have all signed parity bills into law. Unfortunately, H.R. 2047 poses a direct threat to this bipartisan progress.

MSAs pose similar problems. Numerous independent health analysts have concluded that these accounts – if made widely available – could threaten the stability of the private insurance marketplace in the United States, while imposing stiff premium increases on Americans with chronic health conditions.

The MHLG looks forward to working closely with the House leadership – in the second session of the 106th Congress – to pursue proposals that expand access to health care without the unintended consequences of H.R. 2047 and related legislation.

Sincerely,

American Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation
American Association of Pastoral Counselors
American Counseling Association
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety Disorders Association of America
Association for the Advancement of Psychology
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems
National Association of Psychiatric Treatment Centers for Children
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Mental Health Association

Potential Signers

Alliance for Children and Families
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association of Children's Residential Centers
American Association of Private Practice Psychiatrists
American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work
American Hospital Association
American Managed Behavioral Healthcare Association
American Nurses Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Child Welfare League of America
Clinical Social Work Federation
Corporation for the Advancement of Psychiatry
Employee Assistance Professionals Association
Federation of Behavioral, Psychological & Cognitive Sciences
International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services
National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association
Washington Business Group on Health

Observers

AARP
American Family Foundation
Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, HHS
Center for Mental Health Services, SAMHSA
Health Policy Tracking Service
National Association of Counties
National Association of Developmental Disabilities Councils
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Foundation for Depressive Illness
National Institute of Mental Health
National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health
President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Applied for MHLG membership

American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Society of Clinical Psychopharmacology
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders