

Brain Injury
Association
of America



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Creating a better future through brain injury prevention, research, education and advocacy

March 3, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the U.S. House
of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Boehner
Republican Leader, U.S. House
of Representatives
H-204 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader Boehner:

On behalf of the Brain Injury Association of America, I am writing to express our support for H.R. 1424, the *Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act*, which would prohibit insurance discrimination against 80 million Americans suffering from addiction and mental illness.

An intricate and intertwined relationship exists between substance abuse, mental health, and traumatic brain injury (TBI). Substance use and abuse is often both an antecedent to and a consequence of TBI. Incidence data indicate that substance abuse significantly raises an individual's risk of sustaining a brain injury. TBI is one of the most common and tragic consequences of substance abuse, especially by teenagers and young adults. In addition, neurobehavioral problems commonly arise as a direct result of TBI, and psychotherapeutic services are integral to successful neurorehabilitation programs. Access to comprehensive and specialized addiction and mental health services is critical to maximizing the recovery of individuals brain injury.

The time for the passage of parity is now. More than 25 million people need mental health and addiction treatment but are not getting it. Legislation to bring full equity to mental health coverage has been introduced in the House in every Congress since the 107th session but until this year, it never received consideration in committees or on the floor despite bipartisan majority cosponsorship. Now, the *Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act* (H.R. 1424), introduced by Representatives Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) and Jim Ramstad (R-MN), has the support of the majority of the House with 273 cosponsors. The bill has been favorably reported by the Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce and Education and Labor Committees. Remarkably, 14 different field hearings documenting the need for equity in health plans for the treatment of addiction and mental illness were held around the country in 2007. The record shows parity is a priority that must be passed now.

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Because of the critical nature of this legislation, the Brain Injury Association of America urges you to pass H.R. 1424 when it comes to the floor this week. Our organization stands ready to assist you toward the goal of achieving fairness in health plans for all Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan H. Connors". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Susan H. Connors, President/CEO
Brain Injury Association of America

CC: All Members of Congress