

March 4, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

We write in joint and strong opposition to H.R. 1424, the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act of 2007 and related bills. We urge you to adopt the language of the Senate-passed parity bill, S. 558, the Mental Health Parity Act, in its stead.

We strongly oppose H.R. 1424 as introduced and subsequently marked up, because it:

- imposes a broad benefit mandate (DSM-IV) that preempts lesser state coverage mandates;
- lacks adequate protection for the medical management of benefits;
- allows the states to enact more extensive laws including an alternative remedy structure for mental health or substance abuse benefits; and
- mandates out-of-network coverage if other benefits are offered on an out-of-network basis.

Successive markups in the three House Committees of jurisdiction (Education and Labor; Energy and Commerce; and Ways and Means) failed to improve this legislation and in fact made it progressively worse. The House bills would threaten our ability to maintain the mental health coverage that today is a vital component of employer-sponsored health plans.

The undersigned organizations supported the bipartisan Senate negotiations which resulted in a more balanced compromise proposal. We cannot support and will continue to work to defeat H.R. 1424 as introduced and subsequently amended.

Again, we strongly oppose the House bill, H.R. 1424, and urge its defeat in the full House. We urge the House instead to work with us to help pass S. 558 and enact meaningful mental health parity legislation this year.

Sincerely,

National Retail Federation
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
National Association of Wholesaler-
Distributors
American Benefits Council
Aetna

BlueCross BlueShield Association
National Business Group on Health
National Association of Health Underwriters
Retail Industry Leaders Association
National Restaurant Association
Team Builders International