

August 3, 2007

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
The Honorable Michael B. Enzi
The Honorable Pete V. Domenici
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kennedy and Senators Enzi and Domenici:

We write in joint support of the bipartisan agreement on mental health parity reached on August 2, 2007. We urge prompt Senate action on the resulting manager's amendment to the bipartisan Mental Health Parity Act of 2007, S. 558. We support enactment of this legislation into law this year.

The undersigned business and insurance organizations have remained committed to the bipartisan and inclusive Senate process and the balanced legislation that process produced. The HIPAA standard for governing the divide between federal and state regulation of group health plans and health insurance is one that we are familiar with and largely comfortable with because it is the same standard that applies under the current law mental health parity requirements which Congress enacted in 1996.

We continue to support the principle of uniformity of benefits supported in the previous versions of this bill. But, we understand the pressure many Senators have been under to answer state concerns and have agreed to this accommodation in order to speed this agreement to the Senate floor. We believe it to be of paramount importance that this agreement be quickly approved by a strong bipartisan majority and thus reduce momentum for the House bill we so strongly oppose.

The House mental health parity bill includes provisions which undermine the ability of employers to determine the benefits they cover in the health plans they voluntarily offer to their employees, allow states to enact sweeping new remedies which would apply solely to mental health coverage, and inadequately protect the medical management of benefits so important to ensuring quality and affordable health care. The House bill is wholly unacceptable to us.

We urge prompt adoption by the full Senate of the August 2, 2007 agreement and will join you in opposing additional unacceptable or weakening amendments during the Senate debate. We will remain committed to this bipartisan approach as this legislation progresses. Thank you again for your joint leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

National Retail Federation
Aetna
National Association of Health Underwriters
National Association of Wholesaler-
Distributors
Retail Industry Leaders Association

Society for Human Resource Management
BlueCross BlueShield Association
American Benefits Council
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
CIGNA
National Association of Manufacturers