



Patrick J. Kennedy

Dear Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee,

As lead sponsor of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA), I commend you all for understanding while we may have parity in the letter of the law, we still do not have parity in practice. For this reason, passing SB 384 is critically important to make sure that we finally achieve full implementation of MHPAEA.

As you may know, the consulting firm Milliman issued a report late last year titled, *Addiction and mental health vs. physical health: Analyzing disparities in network use and provider reimbursement rates*. The report examined how commercial insurers were performing in terms of out-of-network utilization for mental health and substance use disorder services versus out-of-network utilization for medical and surgical services in all 50 states. The report also examined reimbursement rates. Unfortunately, the results in Connecticut were abysmal and worse than most other states.

This is quite shocking because the Connecticut General Assembly has been probably the most active state legislature in terms of parity in recent years. My organization, the Kennedy Forum, has a website found at paritytrack.org that tracks parity implementation throughout the country. We have seen that the General Assembly has passed at least one bill every session since 2013 related to insurance coverage for mental health and addiction. Despite this, it looks like insurers are still finding a way to get around the law. Or, maybe they're not intentionally skirting the law but are still falling short of its requirements due to its complexity. Either way, what's clear is that we need more information about what it is that they're doing to assure compliance. SB 384 has some very strong reporting requirements that will peel back the curtain on insurers' managed care practices to see if they meet the requirements of MHPAEA and state law.

I am also pleased that the legislation requires the Insurance Department to file a report about their efforts to implement parity. I do know that the Connecticut Insurance Department is clearly one of the better departments in the nation in terms of parity enforcement. However, given the shocking Milliman report results it will be informative to learn how the Department is probing plans for compliance with MHPAEA along with the state insurance coverage sections.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the General Assembly broadly, and this committee specifically for its persistence in fighting for the rights of those with mental illness and substance use disorder. Parity is the medical civil rights issue of the 21st Century and while the struggle for equity in health care is challenging and full of setbacks, it is nonetheless critical to march onward so that we may mitigate suffering and save lives.

Sincerely,

Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy
Founder, The Kennedy Forum