



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
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Pallone Calls for Stronger Mental Health Parity

Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following remarks at a Subcommittee on Health Hearing on “An Examination of Federal Mental Health Parity Laws and Regulations”:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning and thank you to our witnesses for joining us. We’re here this morning to have a discussion on the state of mental health parity in America. Current mental health parity law requires that insurers treat mental health and substance use disorder care the same way they treat medical or physical care. This includes copayments, treatment limits, and prior authorizations.

Today, more than 41 million adults have some form of mental illness, but, in 2014, less than half of them received mental health care. And more than 20 million people over the age of 12 have a substance use disorder, but only 2.6 million received treatment at a specialty facility in 2014. Perhaps this can be explained in part because a majority of Americans do not know that there are mental health parity protections in current law.

This Congress, we’ve had several important conversations on the challenges facing our mental health system, and we recently passed a bipartisan mental health bill in the House. I’m pleased that we’re here today to continue that work by having a more in-depth discussion on mental health parity.

The last time we made major improvements to mental health parity laws was in 2010 when we passed the Affordable Care Act. The ACA expanded both parity protections and health insurance coverage, making early treatment and prevention services more accessible to millions of Americans. Under the ACA, all new individual and small group insurance plans are mandated to cover mental health and substance use disorder services as one of ten Essential Health Benefits. In addition, the ACA expanded parity protections for mental health and substance use disorder services to individual health plans and certain Medicaid plans. This essentially means that these plans must provide coverage for mental health and substance use disorder services at the same level as coverage for other medical services.

Today I'm interested in hearing from our witnesses about how our current parity laws are being implemented and enforced --because without proper enforcement, our parity laws will not have the impact we hope for them to have.

Finally, I'd like to thank Congressman Joe Kennedy for his strong leadership on this topic and for requesting this hearing. He's sponsored legislation this Congress that contains important parity provisions that were not included in our House passed bill. It's clear that we can and should be doing more to ensure that Americans are able to access necessary mental health and substance use disorder services, and I hope this hearing will shed some light on what steps we can take going forward.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today -- and I'd like to yield the remainder of my time to Congressman Kennedy.

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