

September 14, 2009

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman
Committee on Finance
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the American Bar Association and its nearly 400,000 members, I write to you today to urge your Committee to include in its proposed health care reform legislation the provisions with respect to parity of mental health and substance abuse disorder benefits that are contained in P.L. 110-343, the "Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act of 2008." The provisions of last year's "parity" legislation, however, are only applicable to certain employer-sponsored health care plans. To ensure that the millions of Americans suffering from addiction are provided equitable coverage, the "parity" provisions should be made applicable to all plans covered by the new health care legislation.

Because dependence on alcohol or other drugs is a disease, the American Bar Association has long supported the principle that insurance coverage for the treatment of alcohol and drug disorders should be at parity with that for other diseases. Eliminating inequality in the benefits provided for the treatment of addiction is the key to extending coverage to the millions of Americans suffering from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. It is estimated that 22.6 million Americans needed treatment for a substance use problem in the past year, and only 18 percent of those needing substance use treatment received it. Providing parity in benefits for the treatment of these disorders on a par with benefits provided for other medical and surgical problems would make an enormous difference in the treatment of millions of Americans who desperately need it.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,



Thomas M. Susman

cc: Members, Senate Finance Committee
H. Robert Fiebach, Chair, ABA Standing Committee on Substance Abuse