September 19, 2008

Dear Representative:

As Congress continues its work in the final weeks of the 110th Congress, the American Bar Association urges you to pass compromise mental health and addiction parity legislation. The ABA supports the enactment of the compromise legislation on H.R. 1424 and S. 558, now titled the “Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act,” as a major step forward in bringing parity to medical treatment for substance abuse and mental health disorders in comparison with other medically necessary care.

Currently, most health insurance benefit programs, in both the public and the private sectors, do not cover substance abuse and mental health treatment in the same manner as they cover medical and surgical treatment. Often, insurers disallow coverage of specific services, impose annual or lifetime maximums on expenditures for those services unrelated to the treatment standards, impose limits on the number of outpatient visits or inpatient days for substance abuse and mental health care, or simply do not offer coverage for mental health or substance abuse treatment at all. Stringent limitations can act as road blocks to recovery by preventing individuals from receiving essential care. While states may assure stronger coverage for their citizens, the enactment of the compromise legislation would enhance coverage for citizens throughout the United States.

Enactment of the compromise mental health parity legislation would make an enormous difference in the treatment of millions of Americans who desperately need it. It is important that this legislation be enacted before a new Congress takes office and more wide-ranging health care reform issues begin to require policymakers’ time and attention.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Susman
Director