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Robert W. Glover, Ph.D.
Executive Director
NASMHPD

February 29, 2008

The Honorable Patrick J. Kennedy
The Honorable Jim Ramstad
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Kennedy and Ramstad:

On behalf of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD), I am writing to offer our strong support for H.R. 1424, the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act of 2007. NASMHPD represents state and territorial mental health commissioners/directors and their agencies that provide public mental health services to over 6 million people annually. Our members manage community-based systems of care as well as inpatient care in state psychiatric hospitals for individuals with serious mental illness.

It has been over ten years since the Congress passed the Mental Health Parity Act which prohibited annual and lifetime dollar limits for mental health care. This small but symbolically important first step left much work to do; it is now the time to fill remaining gaps by prohibiting treatment limitations and eliminating inequitable financial requirements. An ever-growing body of research, advanced especially during and since the 1990-2000 Decade of the Brain, demonstrates that mental and behavioral disorders are *brain* disorders and benefit in the same way as other physical disorders from advances in science. Scientific knowledge of mental illness has removed all justification for the wide-spread difference in insurance coverage for mental health benefits.

An October 2006 NASMHPD study describes an alarming finding that people with mental illness experience twenty-five years lost life. This is an unconscionable situation that demands immediate action, for all adults and children with mental illness who now face such terrible odds against living a long and healthy life. The harsh reality of poor health for those with mental illness requires new approaches to integrate mental health and general health. Enacting a strong mental health parity law has the potential to measurably improve the health status of individuals with mental illness who suffer other dire health consequences.

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The states' mental health directors commend you for your leadership on this critical national priority. We are pleased to add our voice to the growing chorus of support that was so clearly demonstrated during your highly successful "Equity Campaign Tour" along with the 273 co-sponsors of H.R. 1424.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Glover". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Robert W. Glover, Ph.D.
Executive Director