

Washington, DC -- U.S. Representative Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) voted with a bipartisan majority today to end discrimination against patients seeking treatment for mental illnesses and drug and alcohol addiction.

“Families and individuals affected by mental illness and addiction know all too well just how real, and how destructive, they can be,” **Arcuri said**. “Members of Congress and federal employees already have mental health coverage parity. There is no reason hard-working Americans shouldn’t get the same care. Making sure individuals get the health care they need is good for business and good for our families.”

The Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act (H.R. 1424) would reauthorize and expand the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996 to provide for equity in the coverage of mental health and substance-related disorders compared to medical and surgical disorders. The bipartisan bill prohibits insurers and group health plans from imposing treatment or financial limitations when they offer mental health benefits that are more restrictive from those applied to medical and surgical services.

H.R.1424 does not mandate group health plans to provide mental health coverage. However, if a plan does offer mental health coverage, it must be comparable to medical and surgical benefits that the plan covers. It also exempts businesses of 50 or fewer employees and businesses that experience an overall premium increase of 2 percent or more in the first year and 1 percent in subsequent years.

H.R. 1424 complies with pay-as-you-go rules and includes no deficit spending. It increases the discount that pharmaceutical companies are required to provide to State Medicaid programs for medication provided to Medicaid beneficiaries and prohibits physicians from referring patients to hospitals in which they have an ownership interest.

This bipartisan legislation is supported by a many national health care groups, including the American Medical Association, American Hospital Association, American Nurses Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Counseling Association, National Association of Social Workers, American Psychiatric Association and American Psychological Association.

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