



# Lack of Parity Risks Lives

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Lack of parity risks lives.

My daughter could have died from anorexia nervosa if not for the excellent care she received. But even though we had health insurance, we still had to pay for her treatment ourselves because brain diseases are considered separate from illnesses of the rest of the body.

At \$1,000 a day for inpatient treatment, families are ruined or worse: untreated patients often develop chronic illness or die. This illness kills 10 percent of its victims, and is no more a choice than diabetes or cancer.

Eating disorders are treatable illnesses with genetic underpinnings. With early intervention and assertive treatment, patients can go on to full and healthy lives.

The Eating Disorders Coalition, a leader in legislative action on this issue, reminds us that eating disorders are a public-health problem, with significant prevalence rates, disturbing emotional and social consequences and high mortality rates.

Our family's experience made the issue of mental health parity deeply personal. We have felt the impact of unfair coverage. We know now that mental health care is not secondary to other medical issues.

I want to ask everyone touched by depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar, eating disorders and other mental disorders to support the Mental Health and Addiction Parity bill on the table in Congress this fall.

This bill is the culmination of years of dedicated work by those who understand this issue: Members of Congress and advocates and employers and health plans have worked toward a bipartisan solution.

The federal parity law would end insurance discrimination against mental health and substance-use disorder benefits for more than 113 million Americans. The bill would preserve strong state parity and consumer protection laws while extending parity protection to 82 million more people who cannot be protected by state laws.

The cost? Estimates vary, but most agree that health care costs would rise less than one percent if mental health benefits were covered comparably with other medical issues. This is not a mandate to make insurers cover everyone or at any level — only that mental illnesses be covered comparably with other medical conditions.

It is important that legislators address this bill now, before a new administration and a new Congress take office, and momentum is lost.

I visited the offices of Rep. Frank Wolf (R-10), Sen. John Warner (R), and Sen. Jim Webb (D) personally to express my support for the Mental Health and Addiction Parity Bill. It takes five minutes to call our representatives to speak up for what matters to us, and it feels good.

Please, citizens of Fauquier County, call your representative and our senators today. (For contact info: [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov))

Each call counts, and silence does, too.

Laura Collins

F.E.A.S.T. (Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders)