



September 20, 2010

The Honorable Paul Tonko
U.S. House of Representatives
128 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Tonko:

On behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), I am writing to offer our strong support for HR 6143, the Medicare Mental Health Inpatient Equity Act. As the nation's largest organization representing people living with serious mental illness and their families, NAMI is pleased to endorse this effort to address the discriminatory 190-day lifetime limit on inpatient psychiatric care under Medicare.

Through your leadership over the past few years, Congress has made enormous strides in addressing discrimination in both public and private insurance coverage for people living with mental illness. In 2008 Congress passed the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Protections Act (MIPPA) which included your legislation to eliminate discriminatory cost sharing for outpatient mental health services under Medicare Part B. That same year, Congress also passed the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA). This landmark legislation requires group health plans that offer coverage for mental health and substance abuse benefits to eliminate discriminatory durational treatment limits and financial limitations.

Despite this progress in addressing insurance discrimination, the Medicare program is still imposing a lifetime limit of 190-days for inpatient psychiatric hospital care. This lifetime limit directly impacts Medicare beneficiaries' access to psychiatric hospitals, although it does not apply to psychiatric units in general hospitals. This arbitrary cap on benefits discriminates against beneficiaries with mental illness as there is no such lifetime limit for any other Medicare specialty inpatient hospital service. The 190-day lifetime limit is especially difficult for non-elderly disabled Medicare beneficiaries (those eligible for SSDI) with serious mental illness – many of whom have already exceeded this limit (or are at imminent risk of doing so).

It is time for Congress to address this long-standing discrimination in the Medicare program. Thank you for your leadership in bringing this important legislation forward. NAMI looks forward to working with you to ensure its swift passage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael J. Fitzpatrick". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael J. Fitzpatrick, M.S.W.
Executive Director

cc: Sherry Grenz, NAMI Albany County
Dan Adamowski, NAMI Montgomery-Fulton Counties
Mary Neville, NAMI Schenectady County