



Luján, Murphy, Smith introduce legislation to give the Department of Labor authority

Washington D.C. – U.S. Senator Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M., a member of the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, joined U.S. Senators Chris Murphy, D-Conn., and Tina Smith, D-Minn., during the week of Aug. 29 to introduce legislation to hold insurance companies accountable and give the U.S. Department of Labor the authority to assess civil monetary penalties for violations of mental health parity requirements. This new authority would incentivize compliance and strengthen the protections of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act.

“Americans of all backgrounds are dealing with mental health challenges which have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic – and it’s critical that there is proper enforcement of mental health parity law to ensure insurance providers are abiding by the law and helping Americans, instead of maintaining barriers that prevent full access to mental and behavioral health services” Luján said. “I’m proud to join Senators Murphy and Smith in introducing this legislation that will make mental health parity a reality by allowing the Department of Labor to deter violations of the law and increase access to life-saving treatment.”

“It’s already the law that insurance companies must cover mental health just like they cover physical health, and yet they’re still finding ways to dodge compliance and deny coverage of care. This bill would give the Department of Labor new tools to enforce mental health parity laws, incentivize compliance, and hold insurers accountable,” Murphy said.

Enforcing mental health parity laws

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“We need to treat mental health with the same urgency we treat physical health, and that means making sure everyone has access to the care they need,” Smith said. “This bill would help make mental health care more accessible and affordable by holding insurance companies accountable when they violate mental health parity requirements. I am proud to introduce this legislation, which will bring us one step closer to ensuring everyone has access to quality, affordable mental health care.”

“Empowering our government with tools to hold health plans accountable for equal coverage of mental health and addiction treatment is critical to getting more people on the road to recovery. Most Americans cannot afford to pay for care out of pocket—it’s time we seize the opportunity before us and do what it takes to save lives,” former Congressman and lead author of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, Patrick J. Kennedy, said.

“Correcting discriminatory insurer practices is critical to removing the stigma surrounding addiction and increasing access to evidence-based treatment for substance use disorder. The American Society of Addiction Medicine fully supports the Parity Enforcement Act, which would provide much-needed enforcement of existing federal parity law and help more Americans access comprehensive addiction treatment services,” Paul H. Earley, MD, DFASAM, immediate past president of the American Society of Addiction Medicine, said.

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