

# END MENTAL HEALTH DISCRIMINATION IN OHIO

- About one-half million Ohio citizens suffer from a serious mental disorder.
- About one-quarter million Ohioans will be treated in the public mental health system each year.
- More than 80% of all Americans believe it is unfair for health insurance companies to limit mental health benefits.
- 4 of the 10 leading causes of disability in people older than 5 years of age are mental disorders.
- Most public employees in Ohio, including our state legislators, enjoy mental health insurance benefits on par with other health issues.

Coalition for Healthy Communities  
747 East Broad Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43205



## FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION AMERICAN MILESTONES

1863	The Emancipation Proclamation
1920	19th Amendment (women's suffrage)
1964	Civil Rights Act
1967	Age Discrimination Act
1990	Americans with Disabilities Act
1991 to present	36 states put end to mental health discrimination
2006	When will the discrimination end for Ohioans with a mental illness?

**DISCRIMINATION  
ISN'T OVER.**

WE ALSO DO IT  
TO PEOPLE WITH  
MENTAL ILLNESS.



## IT'S **WRONG** NOT TO CARE

Americans are a caring people. Our basic moral decency tells most of us that discrimination in any form is wrong. Discrimination *always* entails depriving people of fundamental rights because they are "different" in some way. It could not be more un-American.

Unfortunately, discrimination is alive and well in Ohio today. Just ask a family affected by mental illness. They are not hard to find. An estimated half-million Ohioans suffer from some form of a serious mental disorder. Each year, more than 250,000 of them are treated in our public mental health system.

Ohio law presently discriminates against people with brain disorders by denying them access to health insurance coverage

that would help pay for treatment—treatment that helps them live and work in their community. All they ask for is *parity*—the same, equal treatment under the law for those who suffer from serious diseases of the brain that now exists for other physical ailments.

As Americans, we've come together to fight discrimination against women, minorities, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Now, Americans must unite to end discrimination against people suffering from mental illness.

## THERE OUGHT TO BE A **LAW**

In 1991, Rhode Island and Texas became the first states to pass mental health parity legislation. Since then, 34 more states have followed suit. Today, Ohio is among the remaining 14 states yet to end mental health discrimination—a group that includes Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi.

Opponents of parity argue that the cost of mental health insurance is too expensive for businesses. This claim is simply wrong, and numerous studies prove that any insurance cost increases to companies as a result of parity are miniscule.

Since the late 1980s, concerned families, mental health organizations, and elected officials have fought to end mental health discrimination in Ohio. Many bills have been introduced before the Ohio General Assembly to bring about parity, but none has passed.

House Bill 180, sponsored by Representative Jon Peterson (R-Delaware), and Senate Bill 116, sponsored by Senator Bob Spada (R-North Royalton) are pending before the Ohio General Assembly and include all compromises noted above. S.B. 116 and H.B. 180 are currently stalled, with leadership unwilling even to allow hearings to proceed.

Ohio's parity advocates have compromised time after time. Past concessions have included:

- Elimination of treatment services for drug and alcohol addiction disorders.
- Restriction of covered benefits only to the most serious mental illnesses—schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, paranoia and other psychiatric disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and panic disorder as these terms are defined in the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.
- An opt-out clause for businesses if increased costs for mental health insurance exceed one percent of their total premium.

## IT'S **TIME** TO RIGHT A WRONG

Those who believe it is past time to end mental health discrimination in Ohio also fear that time may be running out—*even though it is believed that a bipartisan majority of our State Senators and Representatives supports mental health parity!*

The 2006 elections will bring new leaders into office, perhaps sending the process back to square one and postponing a legislative remedy for even more years. It is time for all Ohioans

who abhor discrimination to mount the ultimate campaign to support pending parity legislation. It is time to *insist* that the Ohio General Assembly bring fairness to Ohio's insurance system and justice to a large group of our fellow citizens.

Mental health discrimination in Ohio must end. It is time to right a wrong.

**For more information, call 1-800-686-2646.**

