

Wisconsin's Small Businesses Oppose Mental Health Coverage Mandate

TO: Members of the Wisconsin State Assembly

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FROM: Fox Valley Chamber of Commerce
Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce
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Wisconsin Builders Association
Heart of the Valley Chamber of Commerce
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Wisconsin Restaurant Association
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As the organizations representing small businesses in Wisconsin, **we strongly encourage members of the Wisconsin State Assembly not to pass the mental health mandate legislation that will increase the cost of health care for small businesses throughout the state.**

As Wisconsin's economy continues to feel the shockwaves of the worst economic recession in modern history, small businesses are struggling every day just to keep the lights on and the doors open for business. Passing an additional health insurance mandate – one that is focused exclusively on businesses that employ between 11 and 50 people – will only add to that struggle.

The Federal Wellstone-Domenici Mental Health Parity bill that was passed in 2008 explicitly allows small businesses to be exempt from the mandate because the U.S. Congress knew it would be a financial hardship for small employers. Businesses throughout Wisconsin are still in the process of implementing the complicated federal mental health mandate, as well as the expansive federal health care reform legislation that was recently signed into law; moving forward with a state-level mandate before the full impact of these federal law changes is known creates serious financial uncertainty for Wisconsin's employers.

Supporters of the mental health mandate bill claim that it will cause only a slight increase in insurance premiums. **The fact is that any increase in health care costs – on top of the increase resulting from insurance mandates that were passed in 2009 – will have a significant impact on many small businesses' ability to remain in business and provide health care coverage for their employees.**

We understand the desire to ensure that individuals with mental health and substance abuse problems are able to get the care they need. However, with the rising cost of health care, little to no operating margins for many businesses, and the uncertainties of a shaky economy, Wisconsin's small businesses can't afford to have an additional financial burden put on their backs at this time.

Thank you for considering the impact that this legislation will have on the small business community in Wisconsin.