



April 9, 2010

# **ACTION ALERT—We Need Your Help!**

**Contact your Representative TODAY and tell him or her to vote to pass the *Wisconsin Parity Act* without further amendments**

## **What is the status of the *Wisconsin Parity Act*?**

Having already passed the state Senate on January 28, 2010, as Senate Amendment 1 to SB-362 on a bipartisan vote of 20-13, the *Wisconsin Parity Act* will be taken up by the Assembly as early as next week.

## **What can you do?**

Urge your representative to vote for the *Wisconsin Parity Act* (Senate Amendment 1 to SB-362) without further amendments when it is taken up by the Assembly.

## **Why is it important for you to contact your legislator now?**

The *Wisconsin Parity Act*, as passed by the state Senate, recognized and addressed concerns about the impact on small businesses by allowing the smallest business—those with under 10 employees—to opt out, and providing for a cost increase exemption for all other businesses. We are hearing that some legislators want to allow additional businesses to exercise the opt-out option, potentially raising the threshold to businesses with under 25 employees. Such an amendment would significantly undermine the goal of the legislation—to close the gap left by the federal parity law, the *Wellstone-Domenici Act*.

## **What are the consequences of additional exemptions?**

Exercise of the Exemption for Small Employers will immediately deprive 100,000 currently insured workers and their dependents of the benefits of parity coverage for mental health and substance use disorder treatment.

Extending the exemption to include the 10-24 worker size category of small employers under 50 will undercut the very objectives of the bill by leaving an additional 100,000 currently insured people in Wisconsin without reasonable and fair access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment.

While protecting small businesses is important, any further amendments to this exemption would essentially undermine the objectives of the *Wisconsin Parity Act*—the closure of the mental health and substance use disorder treatment gap created by the federal *Wellstone-Domenici Act*.

This is a matter of simple fairness.



## Need help crafting a simple message?

Here are suggested messages to representatives. These are just suggestions—it's best to use your own words and experiences:

I'm writing/calling as a constituent to ask that you vote to pass the *Wisconsin Parity Act* (Senate Amendment 1 to SB-362) without further amendments when it is taken up by the Assembly. As you may know, the *Wisconsin Parity Act* passed the Senate on Jan. 28 with strong bipartisan support.

The *Wisconsin Parity Act* recognizes the concerns of small business. To provide additional assurances that compliance with the legislation will not present a burden for some of Wisconsin's small businesses, the legislation includes two exemptions:

- Using language consistent with the federal *Wellstone-Domenici Act*, the Exemption for Cost Increase extends the federal cost increase exemption for large employers covered by *Wellstone-Domenici* to small employers covered by the *Wisconsin Parity Act*. This allows small Wisconsin businesses who experience a total cost increase because of parity of 2 percent in the first plan year, and 1 percent in any subsequent plan year, to opt out of the *Wisconsin Parity Act's* requirements for one plan year at a time.
- This legislation also includes an Exemption for Small Employers which will allow employers with fewer than 10 employees to opt out of complying with the parity provision for one plan year at a time. This exemption will provide the potential for relief from any overwhelming costs of compliance for this category of the "smallest" of the small employers that represent 76 percent of the total number of small Wisconsin establishments and 45 percent of the total number of workers who work for them—or 78,683 firms with 325,577 employees.
- Exercise of the Exemption for Small Employers will immediately deprive 100,000 currently insured workers and their dependents of the benefits of parity coverage for mental health and substance use disorder treatment.
- Extending the exemption to include the 10-24 worker size category of small employers under 50 will undercut the very objectives of the bill by leaving an additional 100,000 currently insured people in Wisconsin without reasonable and fair access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment.
- While protecting small businesses is important, any further amendments to this exemption would essentially undermine the objectives of the *Wisconsin Parity Act*—the closure of the mental health and substance use disorder treatment gap created by the federal *Wellstone-Domenici Act*.

With job creation Wisconsin's number one economic priority, the *Wisconsin Parity Act* will play an important role in helping our small businesses be more competitive. Parity provides an opportunity to improve both the mental AND physical health of workers, which can lead not only to lower healthcare costs but also improved employee productivity, saving Wisconsin businesses billions of dollars annually.

Parity may, in fact, reduce overall healthcare costs, which are routinely twice as high for people living with substance use disorders and mental health disorders. And numerous studies have shown parity to improve health outcomes for people with heart disease, diabetes, cancer and other chronic diseases.

Research has repeatedly confirmed the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of treatment for persons with mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

For these reasons I ask that you vote to pass the *Wisconsin Parity Act* without further amendments.

**Who are my representatives?**

If you don't know your Representative, visit [www.legis.wisconsin.gov/w3asp/waml/waml.aspx](http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/w3asp/waml/waml.aspx)

**Where can I get more information about the *Wisconsin Parity Act*?**

For more information about the bill—including the exemptions and contact information for Wisconsin Assembly members—visit [www.ParityForWisconsin.org](http://www.ParityForWisconsin.org).