

State of New Jersey

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Mental Health Parity Legislation

04/11/2019

TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today signed legislation that will enhance enforcement of mental health parity laws by improving transparency and accountability related to the insurance coverage of mental health and substance use disorder treatment services for New Jersey residents.

The law (A2031/S1339) requires health insurers to provide coverage for mental health conditions and substance use disorders under the same terms and conditions as provided for any other sickness and to meet the requirements of the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act. The federal law enacted in 2008 requires equal coverage for mental and physical health care services.

"No one should have to forego treatment or take on a monumental expense to receive care because of inequities in coverage. We must do everything we can to ensure that individuals who need treatment are able to get it. This new law enhances enforcement and oversight of mental health parity laws to ensure that mental health and substance use disorders are treated on par with physical health conditions," **said Governor Murphy**. "Providing access to health care remains a priority for my administration and we will continue to work to remove obstacles that hinder people's abilities to receive the care they need."

"On average, one in five Americans experience mental health issues," **said Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin**. "Today, our state is proudly providing these individuals with the health coverage they deserve and ensuring mental health services are at their fingertips. Access to health care is a basic human right and I know that this new law will have a meaningful and positive impact on thousands of lives across our state."

"We've been working hard to end the stigma that too often prevents people from seeking the mental health services they require," **said Senate Republican Leader Tom Kean**. "Unfortunately, many who pursue treatment are only dissuaded by insurance limitations that put the cost of care out of reach. This legislation will level the playing field by ensuring that critical behavioral health care services are put on the same footing as treatments for physical ailments that are covered by insurance plans."

Under the new law, insurance carriers will have to submit an annual report to the New Jersey Department of Banking and Insurance that demonstrates compliance with the mental health parity laws. The law also provides a number of additional transparency provisions, including the development of a report by the department, to be provided to the Legislature and posted publicly, detailing oversight of the bill's provisions.

The Murphy Administration recognizes that robust consumer outreach and engagement is a critical component of the department's work and that strengthening a direct line of communication between regulators and those impacted, consumers, families, providers and advocates, is critical to best understand and identify issues related to parity. Commissioner Caride, in recognition of this is announcing a Parity Listening Tour and looks forward to working with mental health advocates and other stakeholders.

"Individuals who need treatment for mental health conditions and substance use disorders should not have to worry about whether these services will be covered in the same manner that services are covered for any other illness," **said Department of Banking and Insurance Commissioner Marlene Caride**. "With this new law, New Jersey is sending another strong message that improving access to health care for our residents is a priority. We are committed to ensuring insurance providers are complying with the law and residents who need mental health and substance use disorder treatment get the coverage they deserve."

"Mental health care is health care. Substance use disorder treatment is health care. Our laws should be clear that these conditions must be covered on par with the way we cover other health care services. Today, New Jersey is taking action to ensure that our laws match our goals," **said Department of Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson**. "I am pleased to join with the Governor, legislative leaders, and the advocates who have led this fight and to continue to work each day to help New Jerseyans with mental health and substance use disorders get the care they need."

"We applaud Governor Murphy for taking action to strengthen the state's behavioral health parity requirements," **said mental health advocate Chirlane McCray, First Lady of New York City**. "America cannot have a fully functioning behavioral health system if insurance companies do not treat behavioral health on par with physical health. This bill is an important step forward."

The law applies to health service corporations, commercial insurers, health maintenance organizations, health benefits plans issued pursuant to the New Jersey Individual Health Coverage and Small Employer Health Benefits Programs, the State Health Benefits Program, and the School Employees' Health Benefits Program.

The law is sponsored by Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin, (D-Middlesex), Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle, (D-Bergen), Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt (D-Burlington and Camden), Assemblyman Joe Danielson (D-Middlesex and Somerset),

Assemblywoman Joann Downey, (D-Monmouth), Assemblywoman Annette Quijano (D-Union), Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey (D-Essex-Morris), Senate Republican Leader Thomas H. Kean Jr. (R-Morris, Somerset and Union) and Senator Joseph F. Vitale (D-Middlesex). It takes effect on the 60th day after enactment.

The department encourages the public to communicate concerns and complaints regarding parity by calling the Department of Banking and Insurance Consumer Hotline at 1-800-446-7467 (8:30 am to 5:00 pm EST Monday through Friday), or by going to the department website and clicking on Consumer Assistance - Inquiries/Complaints, at <https://www.state.nj.us/dobi/index.html>. (https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__t.e2ma.net_click_7mboob_nrddit_v16s0g&d=DwMMFaQ&c=4BTEw-1msHjOY4ITcFLmDM6JB8x6ZgbU2J24IH0HZLU&r=xF3DPDNEH8rwpTwktOjb4MHQ0EgF6v3M0zt3hszQvyU&m=YW2Qi2xLv3IEHxt8ohK-TBLZA-QCNvoIBX-rtOST8XI&s=TR2pYgHdMrX5CQ0SLrd02nlpvTqd-BsKKhtJpGwtGmA&e=)

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