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Robert W. Glover, Ph.D.
Executive Director
NASMHPD

July 28, 2008

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510
Fax: 202-228-0554

Dear Chairman Baucus:

On behalf of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD), I am writing to offer our strong support for S. 3335, the "Jobs, Energy, Families, and Disaster Relief Act of 2008." NASMHPD represents state and territorial mental health commissioners/directors and their agencies that provide public mental health services to over 6 million people annually. Our members manage community-based systems of care as well as inpatient care in state psychiatric hospitals for individuals with serious mental illness.

S. 3335 includes language that requires insurance plans to treat mental illness on par with other medical conditions. Just recently, the Congress took the important step of eliminating the unfair treatment of mental illnesses in the Medicare program. It is now time for the Senate to take the historic step of removing this inequity across all insurance. An ever-growing body of research, advanced especially during and since the 1990-2000 Decade of the Brain, demonstrates that mental and behavioral disorders are *brain* disorders and benefit in the same way as other physical disorders from advances in science. Scientific knowledge of mental illness has removed all justification for the wide-spread difference in insurance coverage for mental health benefits.

An October 2006 NASMHPD study describes an alarming finding that people with mental illness experience twenty-five years lost life. This is an unconscionable situation that demands immediate action, for all adults and children with mental illness who now face such terrible odds against living a long and healthy life. The harsh reality of poor health for those with mental illness requires new approaches to integrate mental health and general health. Enacting a strong mental health parity law has the potential to measurably improve the health status of individuals with mental illness who suffer other dire health consequences.

We commend you for including mental health parity in S. 3335. It is crucial that Congress pass mental health parity before it adjourns for the year.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Glover". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Robert W. Glover, Ph.D.
Executive Director