

***Mid-Week Alert
From
Mental Health America
of Virginia***

December 6, 2007

ACTION Federal Parity Legislaton

We are SO close! Passage of a strong parity law is within reach. But this session of Congress will end before Christmas. If a parity bill is not passed by then, we risk losing it entirely in election-year deadlock!

Join Mental Health America and many, many other advocacy groups in a massive grassroots telephone call-in day **Friday, December 7th** to press Congress to pass a strong parity bill this year. With more than 30,000 lives lost to suicide each year, we CANNOT allow parity to be punted away to “next year”!

Status of parity legislation: The Senate unanimously passed its parity bill, S. 558, on September 18. A similar, but somewhat broader House bill, H.R. 1424, was approved by three committees. Negotiations on parity have taken place between the House and Senate. Grassroots’ advocacy that calls for passing a strong bill this year can help build momentum for achieving a House-Senate compromise bill that can pass both chambers.

Action: On **Friday, December 7th**, use the toll-free Parity Hotline, **1-866-parity4** (1-866-727-4894), to call your representative and senators and leave a message urging them to press their leadership to pass mental health parity legislation this year. (The Parity Hotline reaches the U.S. Capitol switchboard, which will connect callers to their representatives and senators’ offices).

Targets: All members of the House and Senate.

Message: “I am calling to ask the senator/representative to press for passage of a strong mental health parity bill this year! Please work with the Leadership to pass parity now!”

Thank you for taking action!

ACTION Attend and observe and speak up for mental health funding

Joint meeting with the House & Senate Finance Committees

December 17, 2007

House Room D, 1st Floor

General Assembly Bldg

- Agenda (TBA)

FYI Governor Kaine's budget will be released December 17

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Governor's Budget Hearings

- **January 3, 2008 - NOON** *Concurrent Regional Public Hearings on the Governor's proposed 2008-2010 State Budget and amendments to the 2006-2008 Budget*

- George Mason
University, Fairfax
- Tidewater Community
College, Norfolk
- Campbell County Office
Building, Rustburg
- Southwest Virginia
Community College,
Richlands

- **January 14, 2008 - 1:00 pm**

Public Hearing on the Governor's proposed 2008-2010 State Budget and amendments to the 2006-2008 Budget

- Richmond, General
Assembly Bldg., House
Room D.

FYI

2008 Legislative Session

The 2008 Regular Session will convene on Wednesday, January 9, 2008. Prefiling begins on Monday, November 19, 2007. Session is scheduled to adjourn March 8, 2008 and according to the provisions of the Constitution of Virginia the Reconvened Session* will be April 16, 2008.

***Reconvened Sessions**

A reconvened session is held on the sixth Wednesday after adjournment of each regular or special session for the purpose of considering governor's recommendations and vetoed legislation

FYI

2008 Session Budget Amendment Forms

The 2008 Budget Amendment forms are not available at this time. The updated forms should be finalized within the next two weeks.

- 2008 Budget Amendment Form (.pdf)
- 2008 Budget Amendment Form (.doc)
- 2008 Nonstate Agency Budget Amendment Form (.pdf)
- 2008 Nonstate Agency Budget Amendment Form (.doc)

Please note that forms are provided in Microsoft Word (.doc) format and Adobe Acrobat Portable Document Format (.pdf) for your convenience.

FYI

Bills

A bill is a document which either 1) changes the current law, 2) adds new law, or 3) deletes existing law. The idea for a bill may come from General Assembly members, their constituents, lobbyists, the governor, or heads of state agencies charged with administering the law.

Drafting & Introducing a Bill

A General Assembly member tells the staff of the Division of Legislative Services (DLS) what needs to be accomplished by the proposed legislation. The DLS staff checks existing law and the constitutionality of the proposed legislation. A bill is drafted (written) and given to the member for introduction.

The member who introduces a piece of legislation is called the patron or sponsor. The patron is responsible for guiding his or her legislation through both houses. Members or members-elect may introduce legislation in accordance with the Code of Virginia and the schedule for the conduct of business established by the General Assembly.

A procedural resolution that establishes the schedule for the conduct of business for each session is agreed to by both houses at the beginning of each session. This schedule sets certain deadlines for the introduction and consideration of legislation throughout the legislative process.

Current law allows members to prefile bills with the Clerk of their respective body no earlier than sixty days before the beginning of a session in an even-numbered year (such as 1996, 1998, etc.), but bills may be prefiled up to 180 days prior to the beginning of a session in an odd-numbered year (such as 1997, 1999, etc.). According to the Code of Virginia, bills relating to charters, claims, tax-exempt property, additional expenditures by localities, retail sales and use tax exemption, the Virginia Retirement System, or those having a fiscal impact on the Department of

Corrections must be introduced no later than the first calendar day of any session, unless otherwise specified.

FYI

Gov. Tim Kaine addresses a large group of media representatives during "AP Day at the Capital" in Richmond, VA Tuesday, Dec. 4, 2007. (AP Photo/Richmond Times-Dispatch, Bob Brown).

RICHMOND - Mental health reform will be a major priority for state legislators next month and in the two-year state budget Gov. Timothy M. Kaine plans to unveil in 12 days, the governor and lawmakers said Tuesday.

Despite a tight state budget that will include no requests for a tax increase, Kaine said he will propose that Virginia undertake a sizable investment in its mental health system. Though budget times are lean, he said, investing in mental health treatment now would update an underfunded system and could result in significant state savings down the road.

"You will not see any tax increase in this budget," Kaine told a roomful of reporters and editors attending the sixth-annual AP Day at the Capital, held at the Richmond Times-Dispatch. More than 60 journalists attended the daylong series of panels on issues facing the General Assembly starting Jan. 9 and heard from Kaine for an hour as a luncheon speaker.

The April 16 shootings at Virginia Tech during which 33 people died, Kaine said, present an opportunity for Virginia to make much-needed reforms of the system that failed to sufficiently treat gunman Seung Hui Cho.

"In the aftermath of that horrible, horrible tragedy at Virginia Tech, the obvious gaps, the glaring gaps in the state's mental health system, can no longer be ignored," Kaine said. "There is now a recognition and a desire to do something about it."

Richard Bonnie, a University of Virginia professor of law and psychiatry, agreed that the General Assembly ought to dedicate more funds for mental health during its upcoming session, calling reform and new money for community-based treatment services a necessary down payment on a long-term investment.

As chairman of the Commission on Mental Health Law Reform, Bonnie said his panel would make several proposals to the legislature, including one to extend the four-hour period that police officers can keep a person with mental illness in emergency custody. Often, he said, it takes longer than that for officers to find an available psychiatric bed. Other recommendations will deal with mandated outpatient treatment and changing criteria for mental commitments, he said.

Sen. Janet D. Howell, D-Reston, said members of both parties in the legislature agree the state has waited too long to reform Virginia's mental health system, particularly for community mental health treatment.

Howell said Virginia ranks 33rd in investment in mental health services, yet is the nation's ninth wealthiest state.

"It is a moral imperative that we respond to this now," she said. "We cannot wait any longer."

Kaine said he would support legislation to eliminate a so-called loophole that allows individuals to purchase firearms at a gun show from unlicensed dealers without being subject to a background check.

Supporters of the measure say it would help prevent those with criminal histories from acquiring firearms.

"It maybe will keep guns out of the hands of people who shouldn't have them," said Gerald Massengill, a former superintendent of the Virginia State Police who chaired the governor's panel investigating the Virginia Tech shootings.

While closing the loophole would not have prevented the Tech shootings, it might stop similar tragedies in the future, Massengill said.

Cho did not purchase his firearms from a gun show. But in the wake of the Tech shootings, Kaine signed an executive order mandating that people who have been ordered by a court to receive mental health treatment be prohibited from purchasing guns.

Sen.-elect Robert Hurt, R-Chatham, said he opposes changing the gun-show law because it would infringe on the right of his constituents to own and purchase guns.

"It just is hard for me to believe that the government should make me go through some sort of process before I sell [a] firearm to another person," he said.