



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN
EDUCATION FUND**

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To: Senate Committee on Health, Human Services, Insurance and Job Creation

Re: Support SB 375, mental health parity

Parity means equality. Comprehensive Insurance Parity means benefit equality. Coverage for medically necessary treatment for all mental health and substance abuse disorders provides benefit equality for all Wisconsin workers and families. The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin has supported equality of coverage for mental health treatment for over 15 years. We registered and spoke in support of SB 71 and SB 72 in legislative session 2003-2004. We also supported Senator Hansen's SB 128 in 2005. We are here again in 2008 to support SB 375.

Federal employees have had comprehensive parity since 2001. The prestigious New England Journal of Medicine reported in 2006 that spending on mental health and substance disorders for the population covered either decreased or was unchanged after parity in all of the plans studied.

Mental Health America is a national organization representing families and consumers of mental health programs. They released the findings of an independent research company, International Communications Research, commissioned to conduct an attitudinal survey regarding health insurance coverage. A nationally representative sample of 3,040 respondents age 18 and older was surveyed regarding attitudes toward medical insurance coverage of mental health and substance abuse disorders. They report "the vast majority of Americans (89%) including Democrats, Republicans, managers and employees want to end insurance discrimination against people with mental health needs (<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/>).

The myth that equitable coverage would place too much cost on employers has been disproved in many studies, as the efficacy of treatment for mental health/substance abuse disorders has improved and clearly creates a better workforce. The citizens of this country overwhelmingly support fair mental health insurance coverage. More than 40 states have now legislated equity in coverage. The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin will add our name to the list of organizations in support of SB 375 so that Wisconsin citizens can benefit from the enlightened approach to provide equitable coverage for treatment of mental health and substance abuse disorders.