



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday, May 18, 2026

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Asm Harabedian's Bill to Cut Delayed Mental Health Treatment Passes the Assembly Floor

(SACRAMENTO, CA) – Today, Assembly Bill 1970, authored by **Assemblymember John Harabedian (D - Pasadena)**, passed off the Assembly Floor and is on its way to the Senate, moving the bill one step closer to becoming law.

AB 1970 would prohibit health insurance plans from requiring patients with serious mental illness or substance use disorders to first fail on other medication before receiving more effective medications recommended by their doctors. The practice, known as step therapy or fail-first' protocols, can dangerously delay access to critical care for people struggling with conditions such as severe depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and substance use disorder.

For Californians experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis, these delays can have life-altering consequences. Patients in crisis are often forced to wait weeks or months while navigating insurance requirements instead of receiving the treatment their doctor believes is medically necessary. Advocates say those delays can worsen mental health conditions, increase the risk of hospitalization, and create additional emotional and financial stress for families and individuals already struggling to get help.

"No one facing a mental health crisis should have to wait to receive the care they need," said **Assemblymember John Harabedian (D-Pasadena)**. *"AB 1970 will go a long way in prioritizing patients' well being and long term recovery by ensuring that insurance*

barriers do not prevent them from accessing the medication their doctors believe are necessary.”

*“The continued advancement of AB 1970 reflects a critical shift toward protecting timely access to behavioral health treatment for Californians living with serious mental health and substance use conditions,” said **Dr. Le Ondra Clark Harvey**, CEO of the California Behavioral Health Association. “Fail-first policies can force vulnerable patients into dangerous cycles of medication instability. For individuals already navigating psychiatric symptoms, trauma, or substance use recovery, these delays can mean the difference between stability and crisis, increasing the risk of hospitalization, homelessness, incarceration, relapse, and even loss of life. AB 1970 recognizes that behavioral health care must be driven by clinical judgment and patient need, not barriers imposed by insurance protocols. CBHA is the proud sponsor of this lifesaving measure.”*

The bill comes at a time when California continues to see a growing demand for mental health services and increased awareness around the importance of early and effective treatment.

Under the bill, the prohibition on step therapy would apply to health care service plans and insurance policies issued, amended, or renewed on or after January 1, 2027.

AB 1970 will now move to the Senate Rules Committee.

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Assemblymember John Harabedian represents the 41st District composed of the cities of La Cañada Flintridge, Pasadena, Altadena, Sierra Madre, Monrovia, Bradbury, San Dimas, La Verne, Claremont, Upland, Rancho Cucamonga, Oak Hills, Piñon Hills and Phelan.