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Asm. Harabedian’s Bill to Eliminate “Fail-First” Barriers for Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorder Treatment

(SACRAMENTO, CA) – Assemblymember John Harabedian (D-Pasadena)

introduced AB 1970: Ending Fail-First for Behavioral Health Medication, legislation designed to prohibit health insurers from mandating step therapy– commonly known as “fail-first”– for medication that harms those with serious mental illness or substance abuse disorder.

AB 1970 prevents health care insurance companies from requiring step therapy for prescription drugs used to treat those suffering from serious mental illness or substance use disorder. Step therapy requires patients try lower cost medications that insurers prefer and to fail treatment on it before covering the originally prescribed medication.

“AB 1970 removes unnecessary administrative barriers and puts patient care first,” said Assemblymember John Harabedian (D-Pasadena) . “If we are serious about addressing mental health and homelessness, we must ensure people receive the treatment their providers prescribe without delay. We need to focus on the root causes – and that starts with making sure individuals have the proper care when they need it. Ending step therapy for those suffering from substance abuse disorders and serious mental illnesses is a critical step in that effort.”

“The California Behavioral Health Association strongly supports Assemblymember Harabedian’s bill to ban step therapy for behavioral health conditions. This legislation is a critical step towards protecting patients and ensuring timely access to medically appropriate mental health and substance use disorder treatment,” said **Dr. Le Ondra Clark Harvey**, CEO of the California Behavioral Health Association. *“ In behavioral health, those delays can be dangerous, often leading to relapse, hospitalization, homelessness, or worse.”*

This bill establishes clear prohibitions, ensuring treatment can be administered as prescribed by doctors. Ensuring those with serious mental health illness and substance abuse disorder can receive proper care to avoid becoming unhoused.

“This bill restores decision making where it belongs: between patients and their providers. Mental health care is health care, and people should not have to get sicker before they can get better,” further commented **Dr Le Ondra Clark Harvey**.

The bill will be heard in Assembly policy committees during the spring.

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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.