How the Parity Bill Became Law And Why It Matters

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Two years ago I began monthly meetings with the NYS Psychiatric Association, The National Association of Social Workers NY Chapter, and The Society of Clinical Social Workers.

We were in search of common interests and goals. What we agreed upon was that parity inequality represented a significant obstacle to patient access to mental health and substance use disorder health services.

The NYS Attorney General had cited Value Options/Beacon Health Options for multiple parity violations. We studied each finding and dissected the commonalities to the various violations.

The next step was for us to start drafting legislation which would prevent the violations we researched. Such legislation would mandate that each insurance company submit a yearly "report card" indicating their actual compliance with Parity Law. We now had A.3694-C.

We were able to get sponsors in each house. Then came year two.

By the end of the legislative session, we were not getting the buy-in from legislators we had hoped. Our bill would be better advocated for with a larger coalition. We gathered a total of 14 associations and groups to join our team. And then with hours left in the legislative session, we saw our advocacy - including meetings, letter writing, and more meetings - bear fruit. Our bill passed both houses. APAPO wrote a wonderful letter in support.

The governor did not get the bill sent to him for signature until December. He had 10 days to sign it or veto it. We knew that the Department of Financial Services had concerns with the bill as we met with DFS on two occasions. Our fear was on target. The governor, with three days left to sign issued a chapter amendment. It stated that the superintendent (DFS) may keep the survey information secret if it was deemed to have a negative impact on the insurance industry.

Our coalition went into crisis mode. We drafted a letter, signed by the coalition and all original members of the Timothy's Law coalition. The governor had until December 22nd to sign the bill and, coincidentally, it was the date that Timothy's Law (NY State's Parity Law) was signed in 2006.

The 14 associations and groups mobilized their grass roots network. Dr. Dinela Rosa, the chair of NYSPA's grass roots committee call member into action.

Social media was used to urge the governor to sign the bill, reminding him of Timothy's Law and its role in placing NYS as a model state in Parity Protection.
Much to our surprise, within 24 hours, Governor Cuomo reversed his position. He changed the language in the Chapter Amendment to now read that the superintendent SHALL publish the survey results on its website. He ordered the survey for every two years instead of every year but retained our original language in the chapter amendment.

By the next day, the bill was signed into law. Some of us were actually hoping for a signing ceremony on the anniversary of Timothy's Law. It would have been quite a photo-op. But the bill was signed without the cameras and headlines.

It is important to look back and to see how this bill came to be. First, we helped develop a coalition of associations. We found a goal which went beyond us. We found a goal that would benefit consumers with mental health/SU Disorders. Our coalition went from 4 to 14. We met with key legislators as well as DFS personnel. We mobilized. We persevered.

Parity and Mandatory CE were signed on the same day. A big win for Psychology and Consumers. NYSPA is now connected to a team. Parity@10 and the Parity Group now see NYSPA as a partner.

New York has Timothy's Law as our Parity Law. It now has A.3694-C, giving transparency and compliance measures to parity. The bill also has provisions regarding network adequacy and comparative reimbursement - all of which will be compiled and published, without limitation, on the DFS website.

Organizations in support of S01156-C, A.3694-C
American Psychological Association's Practice Organization
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Medical Association
American Psychiatric Association
National Association of Social Workers

American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists - District II
Coalition for the Homeless
Families together in New York State
Friends of Recovery - New York
Greater New York Hospital Association (GNYHA)
Legal Action Center
Medical Society of the State of New York
Mental Health Association in New York State
National Alliance on Mental Illness - New York State
National Association of Social Workers - New York City
National Association of Social Workers - New York State
New York Association of Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Providers
New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, Inc.
New York Chapter of the American College of Physician Services, Inc.
New York State Academy of Family Physicians
New York State Academy of Pediatrics - Chapters 1, 2 & 3
New York State Coalition for Children's Behavioral Health
New York State Council for Behavioral Healthcare
New York State Ophthalmological Society
New York State Psychiatric Association
New York State Psychological Association
New York State Society for Clinical Social Work, Inc.
New York State Society of Anesthesiologists
New York State Society of Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery
NYS Parent Teachers Association (PTA)