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**SPAN USA Urges House to Pass Bill Advancing Equal Treatment for
Mental Health and Physical Health**

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 2, 2007 — Today the Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA) joins with more than 100 mental health and addiction treatment advocacy organizations in calling on Congress to support mental health parity by passing legislation to end discrimination by diagnosis in private sector health plans.

The “Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act (H.R. 1424),” introduced by Representatives Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I., and Jim Ramstad, R-Minn., would prohibit health plans from using higher co-payment rates, lower visit limits and other types of restrictions for mental and addictive disorder treatment than are used for other types of care. SPAN USA supports H.R. 1424, and urges the House to pass the legislation without delay.

“H.R. 1424 provides hope for the millions of Americans struggling with mental illness and addiction. These conditions are no different than other health ailments, and should not be treated any differently,” said Jerry Reed, executive director of SPAN USA. “By reducing the barriers to treatment and the stigma associated with mental illness, we can save lives. Right now Congress is in a position to make a difference, and I encourage them to do so by passing H.R. 1424.”

The legislation would not apply to small group health plans, and would not override existing state mental health parity laws. Health plans covering mental and addictive disorder treatment would be required to cover the same conditions covered under Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) plans. Since 2001, FEHBP plans, including those covering members of Congress, have been required to provide parity of insurance coverage for mental health services with general medical services. Studies of the FEHBP parity requirement and of states’ implementation of parity laws repeatedly show they have little effect on plan premiums.

Research has shown that 90 percent of suicides are associated with a treatable mental illness or substance abuse condition, yet two-thirds of those who die by suicide are not receiving treatment at the time of their death. With greater access to mental health care, SPAN USA believes the number of suicides can be reduced.

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According to a poll by Research!America and SPAN USA, nearly all (92 percent) Americans believe that mental health services such as treatment for depression and suicide prevention should be part of any basic health care plan. And, while nine out of 10 (89 percent) Americans say mental health is as important as physical health, only one-fourth (24 percent) believe physical and mental health are treated with equal importance in the U.S. health care system.

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SPAN USA is the nation's only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors and others to advance public policies that prevent suicide. Since its founding nine years ago, SPAN USA has led the drive to make suicide a public health priority by building political will and calling for the development and implementation of a national strategy for suicide prevention. Using its extensive grassroots network of survivors and advocates, SPAN USA has actively promoted the cause on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures. For more information, please visit www.spanusa.org.

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