



Depression and Bipolar
Support Alliance

February 22, 2018

Representative Brad R. Wenstrup
2419 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Raul Ruiz
1319 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Wenstrup and Ruiz:

I am writing to express the support of the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance for HR 2077, the Restoring the Patient's Voice Act of 2017.

DBSA is the leading peer-directed national organization focusing on mood disorders: depression and bipolar disorder. Unlike any other organization of its kind, DBSA is created for and led by individuals who themselves live with a mood disorder, with our bylaws stipulating that more than 50 percent of both the governing board of directors and paid professional staff must be people who have, or have had, depression or bipolar disorder. This first-person lived experience informs everything that we do. DBSA has a long history of providing cutting-edge, interactive online tools and resources that allow individuals to understand, choose, manage, and evolve their treatment plans. Additionally, our network of 300 chapters across the country offer more than 700 free, in-person support groups. These programs, enable DBSA to reach over three million people each year with current, readily understandable information about depression and bipolar disorder; connections to treatment and community resources; and—crucially—the hope that wellness is possible.

This bill would amend the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA) and require a group health plan to establish an exception to medication step therapy protocol, which requires patients to try medications in a certain sequence, forcing them to try cheaper medications before being able to "step up" to the more expensive prescription drugs.

DBSA opposes this controversial health insurance protocol because this way of approaching treatment can actually impede a patient's path to better health. Studies show that medication restrictions such as step therapy can significantly affect mental health treatment outcomes. One of these studies conducted by the National Council on Behavioral Health and the National

Alliance on Mental Illness found that more than 50 percent of psychiatrists surveyed practicing in community mental health centers pointed to step therapy protocols as one of the most frequent roadblocks to prescribing an optimal treatment regimen, limiting mental health providers' ability to effectively provide care. Most importantly, the study found medication restriction policies such as step therapy directly impacted patient wellness. Three-quarters of psychiatrists stated that patients had trouble complying with medication plans, while 62 percent said patients experienced increased emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and increased health care costs. For individuals who are struggling with coping with a debilitating health concern, these additional roadblocks to seeking effective treatment further slow their ability to address their recovery.

As America's leading voice for those with mood disorders, DBSA thanks you for joining in its commitment to ensuring that all Americans have access to comprehensive, high-quality care that affords every opportunity for recovery by co-sponsoring this bill.

Sincerely,



Phyllis Foxworth
Vice President Advocacy
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance