

December 28, 2017

Councilmember Vincent C. Gray, Chairperson
Committee on Health
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Chairperson Gray:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia, our almost 2,700 physician members, and the thousands of patients whom they treat each and every day, I am writing to you to express the Medical Society's strong support for the **Behavioral Health Parity Act of 2017 (Bill 22-597)**. This legislation, introduced by you and two of your colleagues, will ensure that federal law regarding behavioral health parity is codified in District law as well as expand its application in the District's Medicaid program.

The **Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA)** was landmark legislation when it was passed nearly a decade ago and remains the gold standard today. The District of Columbia has done an admirable job of ensuring its application and enforcement, but passage of the **Behavioral Health Parity Act of 2017** will improve upon those efforts by including fee-for-service Medicaid. At the same time, we support Administration comments that the Department of Insurance, Securities and Banking is the proper place for enforcement except in the case of the Medicaid program and the Exchange plans.

The Medical Society believes that the District of Columbia should be a model for the nation, especially at a time when the need for behavioral health services is increasing. We cannot address the opioid crisis without robust coverage for behavioral health services, and we cannot have that coverage absent strong enforcement of parity in coverage and reimbursement. Please don't hesitate to call upon the Medical Society whenever we can be of assistance. I can be reached at (202) 466-1800 or shanbacker@msdc.org.

Sincerely,



K. Edward Shanbacker
Executive Vice President