

01 June 2009

Good day –

You're receiving this email because we've spoken, and you expressed an interest in learning more about the united stance of licensed mental health clinicians and substance abuse counselors in Vermont, **against** the Seniors Mental Health Access Improvement Act of 2009 **as the bills are currently written**. The proposed federal bills are formally known as: **S.671** (in the Senate) and **HR.1693** (in the House.)

I'm writing on behalf of a task force developed as an initiative of the Vermont Psychological Association to address issues pertinent to Vermont's master's degreed psychologists, or Psychologist-Master's: this effort reflects the organization's goal of restoring eligibility for Medicare reimbursement to psychologist-master's.

In this process, we've learned that: 1) these issues are actually states' rights issues and 2) the issues are germane to the access of care by the most vulnerable populations – the elderly and disabled, and a broader range of services is needed. In Vermont, the movement has evolved to one addressing Medicare eligibility for all professionals licensed for independent practice.

*** 1) If you live in Vermont or are committed to the Vermont community, call and/or email Peter Welch, US Representative. State that you oppose HR.1693 as currently written. (eMail – <http://www.welch.house.gov/>) • Burlington 802-652-2450. Toll free in state: 888-605-7270. • DC phone 202-225-4115.

Congressman Welch is a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, the committee that has taken up the bill. Though a Junior statesman, recall Representative Welch's involvement in uncovering the deplorable state of VA Hospitals in DC. He is knowledgeable, sincere, and dedicated to his state and the revision of health care services.

Please succinctly recommend that the HR.1693 bill language be modified to include all licensed, independently practicing mental health professionals and licensed alcohol and drug abuse counselors. Currently, only MFTs (Marriage and Family Therapists) and MHCs (Mental Health Counselors) are listed on the proposed bills. The title of Mental Health Counselor is specific only to that profession: it is not an “umbrella” category. Further, while Psychologist-master's may offer marriage and family therapy, they are not licensed Marriage and Family Therapists.

H.R.1693 was introduced by **Bart Gordon of Tennessee**, representing the 6th Congressional District. **Contact Mr. Gordon** with your concerns at: http://gordon.house.gov/contact/contact_form.shtml. Specific information about counties and towns in the 6th district is attached for those folks in Tennessee and the expats.

***2) Use the attached House of Representatives, *Health* Subcommittee list of representatives working on **HR.1693**. Contact friends and family in those respective states: ask them to call and write emails that call for a revision of current language. Clearly state an **opposition to HR.1693 as currently written, as it does not include all independently licensed mental health professionals, and licensed alcohol and drug abuse counselors. Recommend a revision that would include all mental health professionals, and alcohol and drug abuse counselors licensed for independent practice through their respective state(s) of practice.**

*** 3) Contact Senators Patrick Leahy and Bernie Sanders. **Succinctly state an opposition to S.671 as currently written. Recommend a revision stating that all licensed mental health professionals, and licensed alcohol and substance abuse counselors licensed for independent practice by their respective states, would become eligible for Medicare reimbursement.**

Senator Patrick Leahy: <http://leahy.senate.gov/>

DC office (202) 224-4242

Burlington (802) 863-2525

Montpelier (802) 229-0569

Senator Bernie Sanders: <http://sanderson.senate.gov/>

DC office (202) 224-5141

Burlington (802) 862-0697, In state: (800) 339-9834

Brattleboro (802) 254-8732

St. Johnsbury (802) 748-9269

*** 4) Use the attached list of Senate **FINANCE** Committee/*Health Care* Subcommittee members, grouped by their respective states. Contact friends and family. Ask them to place calls and write eMails that call for a revision of the current language. Clearly state an **opposition to S.671 as it is currently written. Recommend a revision stating that all licensed, independently practicing mental health professionals, and licensed alcohol and drug abuse counselors, as licensed for independent practice by their respective states, would become eligible for Medicare reimbursement.**

Briefly: John D. Rockefeller, WV –
Chair<http://www.rockefeller.senate.gov/>
DC office (202) 224-6472
Martinsburg (304) 262-9285. See web site for other addresses.

Orrin Hatch, UT – Ranking Member
<http://hatch.senate.gov/public/>
DC office (202) 224-5251

See attached list for *Health Care* Subcommittee members.

The actions of making calls and writing eMails are key. People will ask for additional assistance such as phone numbers and eMail addresses: I am asking you to provide the attached information, as needed. If your birth state is outside of Vermont or Tennessee, please *Google* the state's representatives and provide that information via snail mail or eMail to people back home. It is your personal connection with them that will communicate the imperative to act.

In review, my apologies if the tone of the letter is too directive or strident: our task force is challenged to respond in a timely manner to multiple opportunities for input that require immediate action. It is our intent to personally and respectfully educate and communicate the importance of your timely response and action, in turn. We also appreciate your feedback, corrections and updates.

Again, **HR.1693** and **S.671** were written to address the needs of those most vulnerable – the elderly and disabled. Unfortunately, as currently written the bills do not provide the needed scale and scope of service. A revision of **HR.1693** and **S.671** to include licensed alcohol and drug abuse counselors, and all mental health professionals licensed for private practice is of vital importance.

Please act today. It is a task of democracy-in-action.

Sandra K. Howell, M.S.
Licensed Master's Degreeed Psychologist
Member of the Medicare Task Force
Immediate Past President of the Vermont Psychological Association

Attachments:

VT Council letters to Representative Welch and Senators Leahy and Bernie Sanders
HR.1693 or S.671, as currently written
Information on Henry Waxman
Information of Bart Gordon
Energy & Commerce: *Health* Subcommittee members, by state
Senate Subcommittee on *Health Care*, Finance Chair and Ranking Member

P.S For those who believe there may be less than 7 degrees of separation, read on.

Henry A. Waxman, Congressman from California – representing the 30th District in California (Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, Agoura Hills), serves as Chair of Energy and Commerce. **Joe Barton** of Texas, is the Ranking Member (the “top” Republican). The phone number for Energy and Commerce is: 202-225-2927. Visiting DC? The Committee is located at 2125 Rayburn House Office Building. If interested, see information about Henry Waxman, as attached.

Frank Pallone, Jr., Representative from New Jersey (Sixth District) is Chair of the ENERGY and COMMERCE/*HEALTH* Subcommittee, the group that will address **HR.1693**. Ranking Member is **Nathan Deal** of Georgia. Please know that the *HEALTH* Subcommittee membership list is attached and sorted by state.

IMPORTANT: Peter Welch is not a member of the Energy and Commerce/*Health* Subcommittee, but serves with Energy and Commerce Committee colleagues on the following Subcommittees: 1) ***Energy and Environment***, 2) ***Communications, Technology, and the Internet***, and the 3) ***Oversight and Investigations***. Further, Representative Welch is a member of the Committee on OVERSIGHT & GOVERNMENT REFORM, and the respective Subcommittees of ***National Security and Foreign Affairs*** and ***Domestic Policy***. He is also on the Committee of STANDARDS of OFFICIAL CONDUCT. Please *Google* the committees from Peter Welch’s website for more information.