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<Address Line 1>
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Dear <First>,

As with most legislation, there have been many points of view on House Bill 1154. Thank you for sharing yours and adding to the discussion surrounding this issue.

As you are aware, HB 1154 would require that insurance coverage for mental health services be at parity with medical and surgical services. There is a companion bill in the Senate, SB 5450, which I have co-sponsored and do adamantly support.

Current Washington State law does not require health carriers to include mental health coverage in any benefit plan. Opponents of mental health parity believe the cost of providing mandatory mental illness coverage is damaging to employers and that mental illnesses are unlike other illnesses. We need to move past the taboos that have led us to treat mental illnesses differently than any other ailment. Mental health is a reality facing our communities and we have to recognize and treat it fairly and effectively.

We have a better understanding than we ever have about treating mental illnesses. Considering the personal and economic consequences associated with having a mental illness, we cannot afford to continue letting the diseases go untreated. Under the provisions of SB 5450, employers are required to pay only two cents per hour in order to contribute to this medical coverage plan, one cent of which is deducted from the employee's paycheck. This is not a huge cost and would potentially be offset by reduced employee absenteeism and more productivity by those who are treated.

At least 34 other states have adopted similar legislation to both SB 5450 and HB 1154. Many of those states have studied the impact of the law and have determined that health care premiums either stayed the same or increased only by a slight amount. The excuse of cost is unacceptable given these facts.

As a co-sponsor of SB 5450, I will support mental health parity. I feel that the discrimination of mental illnesses has gone on too long and the issue needs to be addressed.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact my office in support of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Senator Debbie Regala
27th Legislative District