FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PATIENTS AND PROVIDERS PLAN HEARTFELT TESTIMONY
FOR DENVER CONGRESSIONAL FIELD HEARING ON
MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION PARITY

Former Congressmen Patrick Kennedy to Speak
at Field Hearing at Denver Art Museum on January 10

Denver (January 4, 2013) ---- Former Representative Patrick J. Kennedy, in cooperation with the Colorado Coalition for Parity, will host a Field Hearing to hear testimony on local, state and federal efforts to equalize mental health and substance use disorder benefits with other health care benefits, referred to as parity. The field hearing will be held on January 10, 5:30-7:30 p.m., at the Denver Art Museum (100 W. 14th Avenue Parkway). Individuals and families denied coverage for mental health and/or substance use disorder treatment are expected to call on federal regulators to issue final regulations to prevent persistent and ongoing insurance discrimination against those needing substance use disorder and mental health benefits.

The hearing will focus on the implementation and enforcement of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008. Local community members will testify on the barriers that they continue to face in accessing mental health care and substance use disorder treatment through their health insurance - barriers they do not encounter with other forms of health care. Local providers and federal, state and experts will also testify.

“A majority of our veterans will receive their care through the private insurance system instead of just the VA, and this is added reason for proper implementation of parity for our patriots ‘signature’ wounds of traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder,” said Patrick J. Kennedy, former member of Congress and Lead Sponsor of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act. “I am dedicated to seeking full implementation of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act and look forward to adding my voice to the voices of Coloradans touched by this disease.” Patrick Kennedy is the son of the late Senator Ted Kennedy.

“We commend and support Representative Kennedy and Congressional leadership for putting pressure on federal regulators to finalize this law,” said Coalition Steering Committee member Moe Keller, Former State Senator & Vice President of Public Policy and Systems Advocacy for the Colorado Branch of Mental Health America. “Only when there is equity in mental health and substance use disorder treatment and costs can we hope to bring the illness out of the shadows and encourage families to seek care,” said Steven Millette, Executive Director of the Center for Dependency, Addiction & Rehabilitation (CeDAR), & also a Colorado for Coalition Steering Committee member.

Mental health and substance use disorders are staggering in their scope. Approximately 54 million Americans live with mental illness, and 26 million with substance use disorders, with a large number experiencing co-occurring mental illnesses and substance use disorders. Yet many Americans with employer-sponsored health plans include mental health and substance use disorder benefits with more expensive financial requirements (such as copayments and deductibles), more restrictive treatment limitations (such as limits on the number of covered outpatient visits or days in the hospital, more stringent process for medical reviews of treatment), or excluded diagnoses.

The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act requires equality between insurance coverage for medical/surgical treatment and mental health/substance use disorder treatment. The regulations require health insurers to ensure that financial requirements (deductibles, co-pays, etc.) and treatment limitations (visit limitations, medical review procedures) for mental health and substance use disorder treatment are no more restrictive than requirements or limitations that are applied to medical/surgical benefits.
Colorado Coalition for Parity organizational members include:

Addiction Research and Treatment Services—ARTS
Advocates for Recovery
Arapahoe House
AspenPointe
Beyond Betty
Care Solutions, Inc.
Center for Dependency, Addiction and Rehabilitation—University of Colorado Hospital—CeDAR
Colorado Association of Addiction Professionals
Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council
Colorado Coalition for the Homeless
Colorado Mental Wellness Network
Colorado Nurses Association
Colorado Providers Association
Colorado Society of Clinical Specialists in Psychiatric Nursing
Courage to Change Addiction Recovery Center
Crossroads Turning Points, Inc.
Denver Health
Denver Office of Drug Strategy
Employee Assistance Professionals Association—Colorado Chapter
Exempla West Pines
Family Voices Colorado
Harmony Foundation, Inc.
HealthTeamWorks
Level One Society/Denver Health Foundation
Mental Health America of Colorado
Mental Health Center of Denver
Metro Crises Services
Mile High Council and Comitis Crisis Center
NAMI Colorado
Peer Assistance Services, Inc.
Phoenix Multisport
Rose Community Foundation
SBIRT Colorado
Signal Behavioral Health Network
Sobriety House, Inc.
The Carson J. Spencer Foundation
The Colorado Health Foundation
The Denver Foundation
University of Colorado Depression Center
Valley Hope Association

For more on the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 visit the Parity Implementation Coalition website at: http://parityispersonal.org.