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Eating Disorders History Made Mental Health Bill Passes in Senate HELP Committee Including Eating Disorders Provisions from Anna Westin Act of 2015

WASHINGTON, DC. (March 17, 2016) — Yesterday was a historic day for the 30 million Americans experiencing an eating disorder in their lifetimes, their families, and treatment providers. For the first time in history, legislation specifically designed to help people with eating disorders passed with unanimous, bipartisan support in the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee. The bill will likely reach the Senate Floor for vote in mid to late April of 2016.

The Mental Health Reform Act of 2016 (S. 2680) led by Senator Lamar Alexander [R-TN], Patty Murray [D-WA], Chris Murphy [D-CT] and Bill Cassidy [R-LA] was officially introduced in the Senate on Tuesday and passed in the Senate HELP Committee by 11:00 AM EST yesterday morning. S. 2680 included key provisions from the bipartisan, bicameral Anna Westin Act of 2015 (S. 1865), including early identification of eating disorders trainings for health professionals such as doctors, enhanced information, resources and public service announcements to help early identification of eating disorders by the public, and clarification of existing mental health parity law to improve health insurance coverage of life-saving residential treatment for eating disorders.

"Millions of Americans suffer from eating disorders but very few get the help they need," said Senator Klobuchar. "Whether that is due to late detection or insurance coverage, we should be doing more to give patients like Anna the support they need. Today's vote brings us one step closer to passing legislation that would help prevent future tragedies."

Just a short eight months ago, four women Senators, Senators Amy Klobuchar [D-MN], Kelly Ayotte [R-NH], Tammy Baldwin [D-WI] and Shelley Moore Capito [R-WV] introduced the Anna Westin Act of 2015 along with their colleagues Congressman Ted Deutch [D-FL] and Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen [R-FL], who introduced the House companion bill HR 2515. The Anna Westin Act was named in honor of Chaska, Minnesota-native Anna Westin who struggled with anorexia for five years and lost her life due to the illness at the young age of 21. To learn more about Anna's story, you can view a short video created by Netsmart's EveryDayMatters here.

"A few days prior to her death, my daughter Anna told me to keep



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dreaming of a future filled with joy and love and to never let my voice die" said Kitty Westin, mother of Anna Westin and Eating **Disorders Coalition Board Member.** "I took her words to heart, and I have spent 16 years being her voice and the voice for millions of Americans who are fighting eating disorders. Today I feel like all of our voices were heard and we are on the brink of passing historic legislation that will change the way we understand and treat eating disorders."

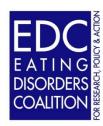
Since the bill's introduction, four of the Senate leaders have taken proactive steps to gain bipartisan support both inside and outside of the Senate HELP Committee. Senator Klobuchar has made a call to action for her colleagues to support this life-saying bill both privately and publically, most recently taking the Senate Floor on February 26th to speak on the bill during National Eating Disorders Awareness Week. A video of her floor speech can be viewed here.

Additionally, Senator Kelly Ayotte has played a key role advancing the Anna Westin Act as the Republican lead of the bill by strategically navigating the internal politics of the Senate HELP Committee and by making it one of her top priorities. On February 27th, Senator Ayotte also spoke passionately about the bill and the need for legislation during National Eating Disorders Awareness Week at an event with Cambridge Eating Disorders Center of Concord.

"I am grateful to the Committee for including key provisions of the Anna Westin Act in this critical legislation. It is so important that we bring greater public awareness to the dangers of eating disorders, as well as help health care professionals and the public better recognize behaviors that may lead to or signal the presence of an eating disorder," **said Senator Ayotte.** "In my home state of New Hampshire, an estimated 45,000 individuals are struggling with an eating disorder, and by clarifying existing law related to mental health parity. this legislation will help better support both women and men who need treatment."

Senator Tammy Baldwin, sitting on the Senate HELP Committee, has tactically pressed the Committee on the bill through the internal process as well as through Committee Hearing questioning and official statements, such as during the October 29, 2015 Mental Health hearing. Senator Baldwin's questioning of U.S. Health and Human Services officials on October 29th can be viewed here.

"I am proud of our bipartisan effort to advance these essential reforms of the *Anna Westin Act*, which I worked on with Senators Klobuchar, Capito and Ayotte, to improve health insurance coverage of treatment and to help health professionals better recognize and understand eating disorders," said Senator Baldwin. "Women and men with eating disorders deserve the same access to quality health care that is available to individuals who are suffering from medical conditions and other mental health illnesses. The Anna Westin Act would help



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improve prevention, treatment, and diagnosis to better support the 192,000 Wisconsinites who are struggling with an eating disorder."

Furthermore, Senator Shelley Moore Capito has endlessly pushed her colleagues to support the Anna Westin Act both inside and outside of committee, leading to every West Virginia Congressman's support of the bill. Senator Capito also visited West Virginia University Disordered Eating Center on February 22nd, expressing her great concern for people with eating disorders and need for further action in West Virginia.

"After recently visiting the West Virginia University Disordered Eating Center and learning more about the millions of Americans who suffer from eating disorders but don't receive treatment, I am 100 percent focused on bringing relief to those coping with this very difficult disease. I am pleased that the HELP Committee advanced key provisions of the *Anna Westin Act* and look forward to this legislation receiving a vote on the Senate floor," said Senator Capito.

The Anna Westin Act of 2015 currently has more than 80 bipartisan, bicameral Congressional supporters who span the nation geographically, including Senator Lindsey Graham from South Carolina, Congresswoman Grace Napolitano from California, Senator Lisa Murkowski from Alaska, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand from New York, and many more in between.

The Eating Disorders Coalition is a Washington, D.C.-based, federal advocacy organization comprised of treatment providers, advocacy organizations and entities, parents of children with eating disorders, and people experiencing eating disorders nationwide. For more information contact Katrina Velasquez at the Eating Disorders Coalition at kvelasquez@eatingdisorderscoaltion.org. Additional resources can also be found at www.eatingdisorderscoalition.org.

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