

Alaska Psychological Association  
Federal and State Advocacy 2009 Summary  
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## FEDERAL ADVOCACY

Here is a synopsis of the main focus of our federal lobbying efforts this past year. Lobbying includes our Hill visits set up by our lobbyist at the end of the State Leadership Conference in March and follow-up phone calls and emails throughout the rest of the year, and all those calls for people to send in emails of course.

Mental Health Parity - We are still relishing the success - the Domenici-Wellstone Mental Health Parity Act finally passed in late 2008 and is set to take effect in January of 2010! We have been lobbying for this every year since the first bill passed in 1996 and it is nice to be done with this one for a little while. It's when the law goes into effect the we begin to see unintended consequences, so I am sure APAPO, Government Relations people will continue to monitor this issue.

Medicare Reimbursement/Cuts - Medicare reimbursement schedules are generally one of our lobbying issues and they were again this year. As bad as the reimbursement issues can be, those may pail compared to the consequences of failing to stop the implementation of the Sustainable Growth Rate legislative mandates that would lead to untenable cuts to the current reimbursement schedule. We appear to have successfully held the SGR cuts at bay, though a permanent solution still needs to be worked out. How Health care legislation will effect Medicare is truly a wildcard as of this writing. The national strategy seems to be to try and fix Medicare as part of any comprehensive health care reform. I'm sure this will be on our lobbying plate for this next year.

Mentally Ill Offender and Treatment Crime Reduction Act (MIOTCRA) - this legislation previously passed, has generally failed to received adequate funding for it's mandate, so we have been lobbying for full funding. I was just notified that the act has received an increase in funding for FY 2010; a \$2 million increase from fiscal year 2009. The President is expected to sign the bill. MIOTCRA supports programs to improve inmates' mental health treatment, train law enforcement personnel to respond to incidents involving mentally ill individuals, facilitate mental health courts and provide for reporting of the rate of serious mental illness among those in custody or on parole. It seems that MIOTCRA and the mental health courts programs have become entrenched in public policy over the years since their inception,; we just need to keep after them about the funding.

## STATE ADVOCACY

Our efforts in this last year, and at least through this next congressional session have largely been focused on HB 110, which was introduced for us by Representative Bob Herron. The bill is

designed to tighten up the language pertaining to who can hold themselves out to be a “psychologist.” You can see the bill at <http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/start.asp> (Just type in HB 110). While the legislature is generally receptive, there have been a number of concerns raised about unintentionally limiting paraprofessionals and faith-based counselors from contributing to social solutions in their way. I believe we have hit upon a compromise that will allow this bill to pass through the process this session and into law. But we will spend considerably lobbying energy on this, especially by our lobbyist in Juneau, John Walsh.

Phil Baker continues to appear at each licensing board meeting to represent AKPA’s concerns, if there are any and otherwise observe board proceedings. Dr. Baker was instrumental in attempting to add AKPA’s Diversity Committee’s recommendation that Alaska have a cultural/diversity requirement as part of continuing education all psychologists and psychological associates must obtain each licensing period. While the licensing board was not receptive in 2009, we are hopeful they will see things differently in 2010. Dr. Baker continues to provide the liaison between AKPA and our State Psychology Licensing Board to present the work and concerns of our members about the practice of psychology and convey back the concerns of the Board about the work of psychologist in our State.