

# Portsmouth Times: Portman supports behavior health bill

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**By Frank Lewis The Portsmouth Daily Times, Ohio**

Nov. 23--In recent weeks, U.S. Senator Rob Portman (R-Ohio) has thrown his support behind several measures he says will improve the delivery and coordination of behavioral health services.

Last week, Portman introduced the Behavioral Health Information Technology Coordination Act (S. 1685) to ensure mental health providers are part of the nation's electronic medical records network. In addition, the bill would add mental health professionals to legislation passed in 2009 to assist healthcare providers in adopting health-information technology.

"Due to a disconnect between our nation's doctors and mental health care professionals, Americans suffering from mental illness are among the nation's most underserved and overlooked populations," Portman said. "By fixing an oversight in the system and making Health IT the bedrock to fully integrated care, my bill will enhance care and treatment for the mentally ill and put them on a path to lead healthy and productive lives."

Portman's efforts have gained statewide as well as local support.

"The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers is very excited and appreciative of Senator Portman's introduction of the Behavioral Health IT Coordination Act (S. 1685)," Hubert Wirtz, CEO, The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers, said. "Adequate investment in health care information technology is critical to enabling mental health and addiction providers to implement systems that help them improve care coordination, provide quality care, measure outcomes and enable continuity of care between primary care, mental health and addiction services. Without this, community behavioral health providers cannot adequately track outcomes, engage in wellness management, and engage in cost-effective chronic disease prevention and recovery."

"I'm not aware of the specifics of Senator Portman's bill, but I do believe he has a sincere interest in helping addicted people and the agencies that treat them. The Counseling Center, under the leadership of Executive Director Andy Albrecht, is currently making a significant investment in enhancing electronic health care records and the management of health data. Meaningful Use funding would provide some financial relief for agencies like

TCC as we continue to adapt to this newer technology," Ed Hughes, CEO Compass Community Health, said.

Congressman Tim Murphy (R-PA-18) has introduced bipartisan companion legislation in the House of Representatives. The Behavioral Health Information Technology Act (H.R. 2957) has been endorsed by the American Psychological Association, Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness, National Association of Counties, National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors, National Association of Social Workers, National Council for Behavioral Health, The Jewish Federations of North America, and Netsmart Technologies.

Last week, Portman also joined a bipartisan letter to President Obama urging him to take action to strengthen our mental health system, by enhancing community mental health services for the one in four Americans living with mental health disorders.

In the letter, Portman encourages the President to expand upon the good work done by President Kennedy when he signed the Community Mental Health Act into law 50 years ago and established comprehensive community mental health centers throughout the country. Since then, however, mental health services have been jeopardized by budget cuts. Portman and his colleagues urge President Obama to support moving forward with legislation by the end of the year to establish a substantial demonstration project based on the bipartisan Excellence in Mental Health Act (S.264), which has been introduced in the House and the Senate.

**The letter was signed by 30 senators.**

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