The Emily Program

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Anna Westin Act of 2015 Introduced in Senate

Saint Paul, MN - July 30, 2015 – The Emily Program and The Emily Program Foundation are proud to support The Anna Westin Act of 2015 which was introduced this week by Senators Amy Klobuchar [D-MN] and Kelly Ayotte [R-NH], with strong original support and leadership from Senators Tammy Baldwin [D-WI] and Shelley Moore Capito [R-WV]. The Anna Westin Act of 2015 is the first-ever Senate eating disorders-specific legislation to receive bipartisan support at introduction. The new bill was written to help the estimated 30 million Americans suffering from eating disorders throughout the United States receive equal treatment as those with other health issues.

On May 21, 2015, Congressman Ted Deutch [D-FL] and Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen [R-FL] introduced the Anna Westin Act of 2015 (H.R. 2515) to the House of Representatives. Both the House bill and new Senate bill seek to improve treatment coverage of eating disorders and to train health professionals and school personnel to identify eating disorders and intervene early; however, unlike the House bill, the Senate legislation does not require the Federal Trade Commission to research the effects of digitally altered photos of humans in advertisements or to report whether these images should be regulated.

"Millions of Americans are affected by the crippling symptoms of eating disorders but very few get the proper help they need, leading anorexia to have the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disorder," said Klobuchar. "Whether that is due to late detection or insufficient insurance coverage, we should be doing more to give patients like Anna the tools they need to overcome these diseases."
The bill improves the treatment of eating disorders through what is now recognized as "clarity of parity". The legislation clarifies the intent of former Congressman Jim Ramstad [R-MN] and former Congressman Patrick Kennedy [D-RI] to include residential treatment services in their past bipartisan legislation, the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (the Parity Law), which required insurance providers to cover people with mental illness equally as those with other health issues. Recently, the former Congressmen released a congressional letter of intent, stating their original Congressional intent to include eating disorders and residential treatment in the implementation of the Parity Law.

The Anna Westin Act of 2015 received its name in observance of a 21-year-old girl from Minnesota who lost her life to an eating disorder. Her insurance company refused to cover the costs of her treatment and the consequences were fatal. In order to prevent other families and friends from experiencing similar tragedies, Kitty Westin, mother of Anna Westin, established Minnesota's The Anna Westin Foundation (now The Emily Program Foundation) and other resources to help people experiencing eating disorders.

Kitty Westin notes, “It is hard to find adequate words to express how I feel about the Anna Westin Act. I feel great sorrow, elation and most of all HOPE. Sorrow because this comes too late for Anna and I miss her every day. Elation because The Anna Westin Act will prevent others from suffering like Anna and our family. HOPE because after 15 years of hard work and commitment I believe that together we will pass the Anna Westin Act and the result will help millions of people and save countless lives.”

Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of all mental illnesses, taking the lives of over 13% of people who suffer from them. They do not discriminate by age, race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Therefore, legislative measures must be taken to ensure that millions of Americans get the coverage they need.

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To learn more, or to schedule an interview, contact Keri Clifton at The Emily Program, 651-379-6134 or keri.clifton@emilyprogram.com.