



# OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

Representative Jeff Merkley

State Capitol, Room 269  
Salem, Oregon

January 30, 2007

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## Speaker Merkley Presses Mental Health Agenda

*SALEM*—House Speaker Jeff Merkley (D-Portland) today called on the legislature to build a broad and comprehensive system to address mental health issues in Oregon. Merkley, addressing mental health advocates at a Capitol rally, said the legislature could not afford to ignore those who suffer from mental illness.

**“In my eight years here in the legislature, this session by far has the most potential to address many of the critical issues facing Oregonians with mental illness,”** Merkley said. **“We cannot look past the problem.”**

In 2005, the state House and Senate passed legislation that requires health insurers to cover mental illness the same way they cover physical illness. Senate Bill 1, or the Mental Health Parity Act, was a priority for both chambers and for both parties. Merkley said he wants to build on that spirit of collaboration to put equally pressing mental health legislation on the Governor’s desk this session.

**“Now that we have Mental Health Parity on the books, it is important for us to look at how the state’s mental health system fits into our overall system of health care delivery,”** Merkley said.

Merkley said the situation is the same for the proposed state hospital relocation. **“When we talk about a solution for the state hospital, we must recognize that it has to fit within a broader framework for addressing mental health issues in Oregon,”** he said.

Merkley also acknowledged the work that Senate President Peter Courtney (D-Salem) has done to find solutions to many of these problems. **“I look forward to bringing his passion to the attention of my colleagues in the House,”** he said.

More than 160,000 Oregonians suffer from serious mental illness like schizophrenia, depression or bipolar disorder. Oregon's youth are similarly affected. More than 100,000 kids under age 18 have experienced a serious emotional disturbance.

**“Mental illness doesn’t discriminate,”** Merkley said. **“In one way or another it touches all of our lives.”**

**“This is not a Democratic or Republican problem – it is our problem. And it is up to us to find a solution.”** Merkley said.

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