



**House Insurance Committee**  
**Testimony by Tony Aventa, MD**  
**House Bill 1337 by Rep. Lacey Hull (R – Houston)**  
***March 14, 2023***

Thank you, Chair Oliverson and members, for giving me the opportunity to testify before the committee. I am Tony Aventa, MD, a practicing internal medicine physician representing the Texas Medical Association, and I am here to testify in favor of House Bill 1337 by Rep. Lacey Hull.

Serious and persistent mental illness is defined as a diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder that causes serious functional impairment that substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activity. These are psychiatric illnesses, including schizophrenia, schizo-affective disorders, bipolar disorders, and major depressive disorders.

Prior authorization requirements help insurance payers control the costs of certain types of treatment such as prescription medication. Sometimes prior authorizations may include administrative impediments (often referred to as "fail first" or "step therapy" provisions) that encourage physicians to initially prescribe certain medications for individuals with serious illness, in part as a mechanism to control costs. However, care delays by prior authorization can lead to hospitalization or severe symptoms such as hallucinations, paranoia, depression, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation among the patients I described earlier.

Moreover, as access barriers occur, individuals with severe mental illness face a considerably higher number of adverse events, which dramatically increase health care costs and reduce quality of life. These include a four times greater likelihood of:

- emergency room visits and/or hospitalizations;
- homelessness;
- suicidal ideation; and
- incarceration.

HB 1337 is an important bill that supports greater access to prescription mental health medication for our citizens with serious mental illness who are insured by commercial insurance plans. These individuals need quick access to medications that will be most effective, and once stable they need to be allowed to remain stable. HB 1337 limits step therapy at initial diagnosis to one medication before they receive the medication their doctor prescribed. For a stabilized patient step therapy may be used only once per year, but only for the generic or exact same medication, not a different drug.

Mr. Chairman and members, respectfully, we need to support improved access to mental health medications for our citizens with serious mental illness. We support HB 1337 and encourage your favorable consideration. I appreciate the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to answer any questions.