



April 9, 2014

Judge Ruth S. Astle
Office of Administrative Hearings
1515 Clay Street, Suite 206
Oakland, CA 94612

RE: Case No. 2013110565 on Kaiser Permanente

Dear Judge Astle:

On behalf of Mental Health America of California, I am writing to express our opposition to Kaiser Permanente's recent motion. The motion asks the court to block the public from attending next month's hearing to evaluate a \$4 million fine Kaiser received last year for violating California's mental health parity and timely access to care laws. I understand that you will serve as the Administrative Law Judge during next month's hearing. Furthermore, I learned that this Friday, April 11, you will be ruling on Kaiser's motion to block the public from attending the hearing, which is scheduled to begin on May 12 and end on June 19.

I strenuously urge you to overrule Kaiser's motion to block me and other members of the public from attending the hearing.

The matters that will be discussed in hearing are vitally important for consumers and advocates across the state, including California's timely-access regulations and the California Mental Health Parity Act. Kaiser is the largest HMO in California and its practices set a pattern for other health plans.

Furthermore, for far too long issues related to mental health care have been subject to stigma and relegated to the dark corners of our society. It would be a travesty if a hearing about substandard care by our state's largest HMO were also hidden from public view.

We are also deeply troubled by the ramifications this decision may have regarding the enforcement of important consumer protections, like mental health parity, by our state's regulators. The public is counting on robust enforcement of these laws by the Department of Managed Health Care particularly as so many more Californians now are members of health plans through Covered California, our state's health insurance exchange, and the subsidies provided now for coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

There are many other reasons for allowing the public to attend next month's hearing, but these reasons alone are sufficient.

I thank you in advance for your attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,


Pat Bennett
MHAC President

www.mhac.org