

# United States Congress

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## **Harkin, Bayh, Bond Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Improve Health and Lower Health Care Costs through Medical-Legal Partnerships**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** –Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA), Evan Bayh (D-IN) and Kit Bond (R-MO) today introduced the bipartisan *Medical-Legal Partnerships for Health Act*, legislation aimed at improving public health and lowering health care costs by promoting medical-legal partnerships (MLP). MLPs bring legal aid attorneys into the clinical health care setting to integrate preventive law and preventive medicine. MLPs provide essential legal assistance, which is often necessary to prevent and treat illness and injury. For example: domestic violence victims who need medical attention often also need legal help to prevent future abuse; citizens with chronic illnesses often need an attorney to address housing issues, such as lack of heat or the presence of lead paint; and a lawyer can be necessary to get a patient the disability, Medicaid or Medicare benefits to which they are entitled. To meet this growing demand for MLPs, the legislation introduced today authorizes \$10 million to create a Federal MLP demonstration and evaluation program.

“Assistance in navigating our legal system is sometimes all it takes to prevent individuals and their families from making repeated trips to the doctor or hospital for a reoccurring condition. MLPs help people obtain legal aid necessary to ensure that they receive the care and benefits they deserve, to lead healthier lives and to avoid future injuries and illnesses,” **said Harkin, Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee.** “Through making investments in MLPs, we also save money by addressing preventable health conditions. It is my hope that we can get the support needed in Congress for this important service.”

“Better integration of preventive medicine and pragmatic legal assistance will result in better care for individuals and a smarter deployment of our scarce health care resources,” **Bayh said.** “Our bill will encourage medical experts and lawyers to work together to improve the health and wellness of families and cut unnecessary spending on preventable medical conditions. This is a win-win program that can make a real difference in the lives of Hoosiers.”

“No one should be denied the medical attention they need because they cannot navigate the labyrinth of our legal system. Cutting the red tape between doctors and lawyers will not only save money, but by improving public health and awareness, will have the potential to save lives,” **said Bond.**

MLPs have received support, endorsement, or awards from the **American Medical Association**, the **American Bar Association**, the **American Academy of Pediatrics**, the **American Hospital Association** and the **Accreditation Council of Graduate Medical Education**, among other organizations.

Specifically, the *Medical-Legal Partnerships for Health Act* will:

- **Save Health Care Costs:** The average Emergency Room visit costs \$383, and the average cost per day of a hospital stay is \$5,217. Preliminary data from an ongoing pilot study in Boston shows a 50 percent decrease in ER visits following MLP intervention. MLPs bring significant cost savings to patients, health systems and tax payers by preventing poor health and illness resulting from unmet basic needs, keeping patients out of the ER.

- **Support Hospitals and Attorneys Partnering to Solve Local Problems:** The Act provides Federal support to hospitals and attorneys to establish MLPs, and it encourages local buy-in by requiring each MLP to match grant funds by at least 10 percent. Furthermore, MLPs will create high-quality jobs focused on improving local communities.
- **Support a Healthier Workforce:** Absenteeism and presenteeism (lost productivity due to illness-related underperformance) cost America's businesses over \$1 trillion a year. Individuals who are helped by MLP intervention will become healthier and more productive workers, improving their employment opportunities and benefitting their employers.

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