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an extremely interesting report?

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Blues sued on benefits to mentally disabled

By Norris P. West
Staff Writer

A mental-health advocacy group filed a federal lawsuit yesterday against Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Maryland seeking broader health benefits for mentally disabled people.

On Our Own Inc. of Baltimore is asking U.S. District Court here to rule that the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires insurers to provide the same level of coverage for mental health conditions that they provide for other health problems.

David F. Chavkin, a lawyer representing the organization, said the lawsuit is among the first in the country to challenge a long-standing practice by insurance companies of providing less coverage for mental health services than for other types of medical care.

Mr. Chavkin, who is a supervising attorney with the University of Maryland Clinical Law Office, said that if the lawsuit is successful it could help eliminate "barriers against employment for people with mental illnesses."

Mr. Chavkin said that if the court rules in favor of the organization, the decision will affect about 200,000 mentally disabled people in Maryland. He contends that additional medical benefits would allow them to seek treatment that could improve their job

opportunities.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield officials could not be reached for comment.

On Our Own is a nonprofit support and advocacy group for people with mental disabilities. According to the lawsuit, On Our Own Director Peg Sullivan has a depressive disorder that limits her work. Her illness requires hospitalization and ongoing outpatient medical treatment.

However, Ms. Sullivan's individual health insurance plan through Blue Cross does not cover outpatient psychiatric treatment, the suit says, and her requests for reimbursement of her costs have been denied.

She alleges in the suit that Blue Cross has violated the Americans With Disabilities Act, which went into effect last year, by providing less coverage for mental conditions than for physical conditions.

The suit also charges that the insurer has failed to ensure that people with disabilities are not discriminated against.

It is asking the court to require Blue Cross to provide equal levels of coverage to people with mental and physical problems.

Mr. Chavkin said a cost study indicates that premiums would rise \$2.70 a month for all Blue Cross policyholders should the insurer be forced to expand its coverage of the mentally disabled.

TRIAL

From 1B

and his brother took turns choking, raping and sodomizing the girl, he went over to her to make sure she was dead.

He said he didn't want to "catch another beef" over his parole for a 1978 murder. He also said he strangled her with his belt. Asked what belt he used, he said, "I have it on."

Scott Shellenberger, an assistant state's attorney, ordered Jerome Page to take the belt off and demonstrate how he used it.

Jerome Page held the belt in his hands, and said he strangled her from the front. That description conflicted with the testimony of Dr. Frank Peretti, an assistant medical examiner. He said Miss Hall was strangled from the back.

Tyrone Page told police he choked Miss Hall with his hands from the back during sex. But Dr. Peretti also said the strangulation was caused by some type of ligature, which could have been a cord or a belt.

Robert Lazzaro, Tyrone Page's attorney, seized on that point and said during his closing argument that only Jerome Page talked about using a belt to strangle Miss Hall.

"It seems to me the state and the police have pursued the wrong twin as the murderer in this case," Mr. Lazzaro said.

Miss Hall ran away from home last June 1 and was hiding at a community recreation center near her home the night of the murder. Her body was found nearby in a wooded area on June 4.

GANG

From 1B

from the alarm company and asking employees to check their doors.

"This is nontraditional organized crime," Captain Fitzgibbons said. "Traditional organized crime is usually the Mafia. While this is very organized, it is not the Mafia."

The group, which Captain Fitzgibbons said has burglarized a total of eight stores in Anne Arundel, Calvert, St. Mary's, Harford and Baltimore counties, also is thought to be responsible for burglaries from Vermont to Northern Virginia and to have stolen up to \$4 million.

Largest Selection



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