

July 22, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions
Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions
Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of the Mental Health Liaison Group, a coalition of national organizations representing mental health and addiction providers, individuals affected by mental health and substance use disorders, family members, advocates and other stakeholders committed to strengthening Americans' access to mental health and addiction care, we ask that you bring forward vital legislation, passed by the House of Representatives in May 2021 to help prevent suicide for all ages, enable diagnosis and treatment for substance use disorders, and overall support patients with mental health conditions.

We urge the Committee to act swiftly to approve the following House passed bills:

Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act (S. 1795/H.R.1475)

Introduced by Sens. Menendez (D-NJ), Cortez Masto (D-NV), and Booker (D-NJ), the *Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act* is the first comprehensive federal legislation to address increasing suicide rates and mental health disorders among Black youth. We have seen an alarming trend in Black communities where Black children have the highest rates of suicide, rising from 2.55 per 100,000 in 2007 to 4.82 per 100,000 in 2017. If enacted, the bill would provide grants for culturally appropriate mental health services in schools and community settings, increase funding for research into mental health disparities in youth of color, increase support for efforts to diversify the behavioral health workforce, and establish a commission to examine the effects of Smartphones and social media on adolescent mental health.

The STANDUP Act (S.1543/H.R. 586)

Introduced by Sens. Hassan (D-NH) and Ernst (R-IA) the *STANDUP Act of 2021*, which is identical to the *STANDUP Act* which passed the House in May 2021, provides resources and technical assistance to states, tribes, and schools on suicide prevention awareness and training for 6th-12th grade students, and requires SAMHSA Project AWARE grantees to create school policies for suicide prevention awareness and training for 6th-12th grade students within three years of grant receipt. 70% of students who die by suicide will tell someone of their plans or give a warning sign. Equipping our schools with evidence-based suicide prevention

policies will allow all stakeholders in the school community, including students, to be the eyes and ears and to speak up when they see or hear one of these signs from a peer/student.

Mental Health Services for Students Act (S. 1841/H.R.721)

Introduced by Sen. Smith (D-MN), the *Mental Health Services for Students Act* provides funding for public schools across the country to partner with local mental health professionals to establish on-site mental health care services for students. The legislation would provide competitive grants of up to \$2 million each through SAMHSA's Project AWARE to give students access to the licensed mental health professionals to treat their mental health conditions.

Effective Suicide Screening and Assessment in the Emergency Department Act (S. 467/H.R.1324)

The bipartisan *Effective Suicide Screening and Assessment in the Emergency Department Act* passed the House in May 2021, and is led by Sens. Murkowski (R-AK) and King (I-ME). The bill would assist emergency departments in developing better suicide risk protocols through the Department of Health and Human Services. Prior to the national pandemic, the number of teens and children visiting emergency rooms for considering or attempting suicide doubled from 2007 to 2015. The emergency department is often the place within the health care system that provides care for patients with suicide-risk factors, with approximately 10% of emergency department patients presenting with suicidal ideations. 39% of patients visiting an emergency department following a suicide attempt will go on to reattempt suicide within a year. This legislation would provide training to emergency health care providers, establish policies to improve identification and treatment of individuals at high risk, employ additional behavioral health professionals, and improve access to care for patients.

Improving Mental Health Access from the Emergency Department Act (S. 2157/H.R.1205)

The *Improving Mental Health Access from the Emergency Department Act* legislation, introduced by Sens. Moore Capito (R-WV) and Hassan (D-NH) provides resources for emergency departments to adopt more collaborative and connected care models and deploy new technology to better connect patients with appropriate resources in their communities. With growing demand due to rising rates of substance use and suicide and all too often, a shortage of psychiatric beds, patients can remain in emergency departments for hours, sometimes days, as appropriate mental health care is sought. This legislation recognizes that needs vary by patient, provider, and community and allows emergency departments to design the solutions that will best work for them.

The following pieces of legislation have imminent introductions in the U.S. Senate, and all passed the House of Representatives in May 2021. These bills are high priorities for the MHLG and we urge the Committee to consider them as they evaluate mental health and suicide prevention priorities of the Committee.

Helping Emergency Responders Overcome (HERO) Act (H.R.1480)

The *Helping Emergency Responders Overcome (HERO) Act*, introduced by Rep. Bera (D-CA) would improve the detection, prevention, and treatment of mental health issues among public safety officers. This legislation would better identify first responder suicide rates, risk factors, and interventions, and develop best practices for the prevention and treatment of posttraumatic stress among first responders.

Suicide Prevention Act (H.R.2955)

The *Suicide Prevention Act*, introduced by Reps. Stewart (R-UT) and Matsui (D-CA), would enhance data collection and sharing and provide funding for suicide prevention programs to train and equip emergency department personnel in suicide prevention strategies. This legislation would enable real-time surveillance of self-harm to inform public health strategies and support emergency departments to screen at-risk patients, refer patients for appropriate follow-up care, and develop and deploy best practices for health care providers.

Suicide Prevention Lifeline Improvement Act (H.R.2981)

The *Suicide Prevention Lifeline Improvement Act* introduced by Reps. Katko (R-NY), Beyer (D-VA) and Napolitano (D-CA) would support an increased authorization for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to ensure high-quality crisis service delivery. The Lifeline's network of over 170 local call centers answer millions of callers every year, but do not receive the necessary support to respond to crisis demand. This legislation would require increased coordination and data sharing and provide more funding to support community-based crisis service delivery. As the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline transfers to 9-8-8 in July 2022, the MHLG looks forward to working with the Committee and sponsoring Members upon release of the SAMHSA and VA Report detailing the Lifeline's needs for the transition to continue to respond to mental health and suicidal crisis most effectively.

The Campaign to Prevent Suicide Act (H.R. 2862)

The *Campaign to Prevent Suicide Act* introduced by Reps. Beyer (D-VA) and Kinzinger (R-IL) would establish a national educational campaign to raise awareness of the three-digit suicide lifeline phone number (988), suicide prevention resources, and foster more effective discourse on how to prevent suicide. Too often individuals in need of help do not know where to turn, or fear seeking help due to social stigma. This legislation will elevate the national dialogue on suicide prevention, promote life-saving resources, and encourage help-seeking for those in need.

We thank you for your time and consideration of our request to bring forth these important mental health bills for swift passage.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom	American Psychiatric Association	College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)
American Art Therapy Association	American Psychoanalytic Association	Crisis Residential Association
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy	American Psychological Association	Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work	Anxiety and Depression Association of America	Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry	Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare (AABH)	Education Development Center
American Association of Nurse Anesthetists	Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness	Emergency Nurses Association
American Association of Suicidology	Centerstone	Girls Inc.
American Counseling Association	Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)	Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
American Dance Therapy Association	Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder	International OCD Foundation
Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies	Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies	The Jewish Federations of North America
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention	Clinical Social Work Association	Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
American Group Psychotherapy Association		Mental Health America

NAADAC, the
Association for
Addiction
Professionals

National Alliance on
Mental Illness

National Association of
County Behavioral
Health &
Developmental
Disability Directors

National Association
for Behavioral
Healthcare

National Association
for Rural Mental
Health

National Association of
Social Workers

National Association of
School Psychologists

National Association of
State Mental Health
Program Directors
(NASMHPD)

National Association
for Children's
Behavioral Health

National Association of
Pediatric Nurse
Practitioners

National Board for
Certified Counselors

National Council for
Mental Wellbeing

National Eating
Disorders Association

National Federation of
Families

National League for
Nursing

National Register for
Health Service
Psychologists

Network of Jewish
Human Service
Agencies

Postpartum Support
International

Psychotherapy Action
Network Advocacy

Residential Eating
Disorders Consortium

RI International, Inc.

Sandy Hook Promise

Schizophrenia and
Related Disorders
Alliance of America
(SARDAA)

School-Community
Alliance of Michigan

School Social Work
Association of America

SMART Recovery

Society for Psychiatric
Mental Health Nurses

The Jed Foundation
(JED)

The Kennedy Forum

The National Alliance
to Advance Adolescent
Health

The Trevor Project

Trust for America's
Health

Well Being Trust

Wounded Warrior
Project