

April 21, 2021

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2354 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Darren Soto  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2353 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
U.S. Senate  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Angus King  
U.S. Senate  
133 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Representative Bilirakis, Representative Soto, Senator Murkowski and Senator King,

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates and other stakeholders, is writing to express our support for H.R. 1324/S.467, the Effective Suicide Screening and Assessment in the Emergency Department Act of 2021, which would help address the growing epidemic of suicides in the United States by improving the identification, assessment and treatment of patients in emergency departments who are at high risk of suicide.

Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the United States, having claimed more than 47,000 lives in 2018 alone. Moreover, from 2000 to 2018, the suicide rate in the U.S. increased by an alarming 36 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The COVID-19 pandemic will no doubt exacerbate this disturbing trend. In fact, the CDC reported in August that one-quarter of young adults aged 18 to 24 had seriously considered suicide in the previous 30 days.

Emergency departments in our nation's hospitals often provide care for people at-risk for suicide, such as patients with serious mental illness, substance use disorders or chronic pain. Yet, up to 70 percent who leave the emergency department after a suicide attempt never attend their initial outpatient appointment. Further, a 2016 study estimated that suicidal ideation is present in 11 percent of emergency department patients, but only 3 percent are identified by screening.

The Effective Suicide Screening and Assessment in the Emergency Department Act of 2021 takes important steps to assist hospitals to enhance their care for patients at high risk for suicide. This bill would establish a new grant program to assist emergency departments in implementing policies and procedures for the identification, assessment and treatment of individuals at high-risk of suicide, as well as developing best practices for discharge procedures and follow-up care for those patients.

In addition, funding under the program can be used for the hiring of additional behavioral health professionals and to provide better training for emergency health care providers on

identifying and treating high-risk patients. Hospitals can also use the grants for telehealth services for the purpose of increasing access to evidence-based treatments.

As organizations leading the fight to improve access to mental health care, MHLG would like to thank you for your leadership on this issue and for introducing this important legislation that enhances the ability of hospitals to identify and treat patients at risk of suicide.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Art Therapy Association  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Dance Therapy Association  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Nurses Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychiatric Nurses Association  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Psychological Association  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Centerstone  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Clinical Social Work Association  
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)  
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies  
Council on Social Work Education  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Educational Development Center  
Emergency Nurses Association  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice  
International OCD Foundation  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
The Kennedy Forum  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health (NACBH)  
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors  
National Association for Rural Mental Health (NARMH)  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Council for Behavioral Health

National Eating Disorders Association  
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
National Register of Health Service Psychologists  
Postpartum Support International  
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America  
School Social Work Association of America  
SMART Recovery  
Treatment Communities of America  
The Trevor Project  
Wounded Warrior Project

CC: Rep. Frank Pallone  
Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Sen. Patty Murray  
Sen. Richard Burr