

October 14, 2022

The Honorable Karen Bass
2021 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Darrell Issa
2300 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Trone
1110 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Chabot
2408 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Bass, Issa, Trone, and Chabot:

Thank you for championing America's mental health. The undersigned national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and substance use treatment providers, advocates, and payers committed to strengthening access to mental health care and substance use treatment write to voice our strong support for H.R.8637, the *Law Enforcement De-Escalation Training Act*. We are grateful for your ongoing commitment to our country's public safety officers and to improving behavioral health crisis response.

This legislation comes at a moment of crisis in American life. According to CDC data, from August 2020 to February of 2021, over 4 in 10 adults reported experiencing anxiety or depression.ⁱ From 2009 to 2019, the number of high school students reporting feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased by 40%, the number of those seriously considering suicide increased by 36%, and the share of high school students creating a suicide plan increased by 44%.ⁱⁱ Nearly one in twenty American adults (4.9%) report having had serious thoughts of suicide in the last year.ⁱⁱⁱ Providing law enforcement with tools and resources to handle these mental health crises is a common-sense solution to supporting our officers and first responders while they carry out their duty of protecting the public, as 6 to 10% of encounters with law enforcement involve individuals dealing with a mental illness.^{iv}

As you know, the *Law Enforcement De-Escalation Training Act* will direct the U.S. Attorney General to develop training curricula to help educate law enforcement officers and covered mental health professionals about how best to respond to behavioral health crises. Such curricula will be developed with the goal of promoting awareness of de-escalation tactics, alternatives to use of force, and best practices to safely respond to an individual experiencing a mental health or suicidal crisis.

Through the existing Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program, this legislation will help state and local law enforcement agencies train public safety officers to respond to mental health or suicidal crises. This training will place an emphasis on scenario-based exercises, testing, and follow-up evaluative assessments to ensure that officers have the simulated experiences needed to respond in real-life situations appropriately and effectively. It also encourages collaboration between law enforcement units, local mental health organizations, and healthcare services to better integrate and plan training programs, and establishes pathways for evaluating what works.

Law enforcement are a key partner in ensuring that every person experiencing a mental health or suicidal crisis is connected to the care they need. Training officers to identify and de-escalate crises while avoiding use of force will help improve outcomes for crisis situations. It is for these reasons that we give H.R.8637 our strong support.

We respectfully urge the swift passage of H.R.8637, and we look forward to continuing to work with you and your colleagues to improve public safety responses to behavioral health crises.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists

American Association on Health and Disability

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychological Association

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare (AABH)

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)

National Council for Mental Wellbeing

National Eating Disorders Association

National Federation of Families

National Network of Depression Centers

RI International

Sandy Hook Promise

cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Steny Hoyer, Majority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives

ⁱ US Department of Health and Human Services/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). *Symptoms of Anxiety or Depressive Disorder and Use of Mental Health Care Among Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, August 2020–February 2021*. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/pdfs/mm7013e2-H.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Office of the U.S. Surgeon General. (2021.) *Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory*. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2021.) *2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health Annual National Report*.

^{iv} Watson, Amy C. Wood, Jennifer D. (2017.) *Everyday Police Work During Mental Health Encounters: A Study of Call Resolutions in Chicago and Their Implications for Diversion*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6295210/>