

Congresswoman Grace F. Napolitano Statement for the Record
RE: H.R. 1109, the Mental Health Services for Students Act & H.R. 4564, the Suicide
Prevention Lifeline Improvement Act
Subcommittee on Health
House Energy and Commerce Committee
Tuesday, June 30, 2020

Chairwoman Eshoo and Ranking Member Burgess, thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement for the record.

It is vital that we pass my bill, H.R. 1109, the Mental Health Services for Students Act. Beyond the devastation of our nation's economy and Americans' lives being disrupted everywhere, a mental health crisis is unfolding as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fear and anxiety about the coronavirus can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions for our constituents, especially children. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that one in five youth already experience some type of mental health disorder. Yet, prior to this public health emergency, only 10 percent of children and adolescents ages 3 to 17-years-old received any treatment or counseling from a mental health professional.

Senator Tina Smith of Minnesota has a companion bill, S. 1122. Nineteen Members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee are currently co-sponsors of my bill: Reps. Cárdenas, Barragán, Tonko, Clarke, Rush, Matsui, Castor, McNerney, Welch, Luján, Kennedy, Dingell, Veasey, Kuster, Kelly, Soto, Engel, Blunt Rochester, and Schakowsky.

H.R. 1109 provides \$200 million in competitive grants per year for 5 years for 100 school-based mental health programs nationwide. It expands the scope of the Project Advancing Wellness and Resilience Education (AWARE) program by providing on-site licensed mental health professionals in schools across the country. Funding will be distributed by SAMHSA, who will set guidelines and measure the outcomes of the funded programs, to:

- Provide for comprehensive staff development for school and personnel working in schools
- Support and implement comprehensive culturally and linguistically appropriate services
- Deliver assistance to local communities in the development of policies to address child and adolescent trauma and mental health issues, and violence when and if it occurs
- Promote positive mental health education and support for parents, siblings, and other family members of children with mental health disorders, as well as concerned members of the community

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, testified in May before the Senate HELP Committee on the prospect of reopening school buildings and said, "We don't know everything about this virus, and we really better be very careful, particularly when it comes to children". While schools work to navigate this pandemic, it

is critical that we provide them with the resources to create a mental health plan to reach their students during this stressful time.

H.R. 1109 is based on the successful Youth Suicide Prevention Program established in Los Angeles County in 2001. Regular classes will eventually resume, and according to the CDC, children may feel upset or have other strong emotions after an emergency. How a child reacts can vary depending on their age, previous experiences, and how that child typically copes with stress. We need to ensure the long-term availability of mental health services to ensure a bright future for our students, which my bill would help accomplish.

H.R. 1109 has 131 bipartisan co-sponsors and has the support of over 50 mental health organizations, as well as local governments and teacher unions (Attached). It is now time to act on this bill, which has had broad support for decades.

Your Subcommittee will also examine H.R. 4564, the Suicide Prevention Lifeline Improvement Act, which I co-lead with Reps. John Katko (R-NY) and Don Beyer (D-VA). The bill amends the Public Health Service Act to ensure the provision of high-quality service through the Suicide Prevention Lifeline. With call volume and call wait times already at unmanageable levels, this public health emergency will only further constrain the network and reduce access to this life-saving resource. H.R. 4564 would dramatically expand the services needed to assist those in crisis by providing increased funding for the Lifeline, creating a pilot program to research and employ innovative technologies for suicide prevention, and requires HHS to develop and implement a plan to increase quality assurances, eliminate call wait times, implement evidence-based practices, and creates guidelines to carry out periodic testing of the Lifeline.

We would truly appreciate your continued commitment to mental health by reporting H.R. 1109, the Mental Health Services for Students Act and H.R. 4564, the Suicide Prevention Lifeline Improvement Act favorably out of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.