



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

June 29, 2020

The Honorable Anna G. Eshoo
Committee on Energy & Commerce
Chair, Subcommittee on Health

The Honorable Mike Burgess
Committee on Energy & Commerce
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Health

Dear Chair Eshoo and Ranking Member Burgess:

Thank you for convening this subcommittee hearing, *High Anxiety and Stress: Legislation to Improve Mental Health During Crisis*, and thank you for including, as part of the discussion, my legislation, H.R. 4428, the *Greater Mental Health Access Act*. I submit this correspondence in support of that legislation and for inclusion in the record.

Ensuring access to quality health care services has been a top legislative priority since I was elected in 2018. As many learned from my floor speech a year ago, my life partner, Kerry Acker, died by suicide in the early morning of May 25, 2019. In the year since his death, I have received an outpouring of support from people throughout my community in Pennsylvania and beyond. That support and our work in the 116th Congress have helped me grieve and find purpose in that grief. I know others are not so lucky.

According to CDC data, suicide rates in the United States have risen by 28% in fewer than twenty years—data that is likely underreported and worsening as a result of this COVID-19 pandemic.¹ Studies show that family members' risk of attempting suicide increases by 65% after a family member dies by suicide.² This is known as the “suicide contagion.”³

My bill seeks to reduce the episodes of suicide contagion by improving access to mental health services. The Greater Mental Health Access Act would establish a special enrollment period for family members of an individual who has died by suicide, regardless of whether the decedent was a part of the health insurance plan and regardless of whether the death occurred during the open

¹ See U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/suicide/> (June 7, 2018).

² See Alexandra L. Pitman, *Bereavement by Suicide as a Risk Factor for Suicide Attempt: A Cross-Sectional National UK-wide Study of 3432 Young Bereaved Adults*, *BMJ Journals* (Jan. 26, 2016).

³ See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <https://www.hhs.gov/answers/mental-health-and-substance-abuse/what-does-suicide-contagion-mean/index.html#:~:text=Suicide%20contagion%20is%20the%20exposure%20to%20suicide%20or,indirect%20exposure%20to%20suicidal%20behavior%20has%20been%20shown> (Feb. 25, 2019).

enrollment period. It would also create a competitive grant program through which services and support are provided to surviving family members.

Families are hurting in communities throughout the United States. I share their hurt. Those families should not have to wait for an arbitrary period to obtain better coverage and access to the mental health services they need, and I thank the Subcommittee on Health for holding this hearing and considering my bill. I look forward to working alongside all of you to improve the lives of thousands of Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Wild". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a heart-like flourish at the end.

Susan Wild
Member of Congress