

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “Legislative Proposals to Support Patients and Caregivers”

February 14, 2024

I’d like to start by echoing the comments of others and acknowledging Chair Rodgers—a barrier breaker who is the first woman to Chair the full Energy and Commerce Committee in its more than 200-year history. Cathy, I’ve really enjoyed working with you over the years, but especially the last three years as you’ve served as both Ranking Member and now, Chair.

I think we’ve made some very important progress in this Committee under your leadership. I’m particularly proud of our bipartisan legislation to lower health care costs and increase transparency in hospital pricing. Your departure later this year will be an incredible loss for Congress, but I also know we’ve got about a year left and I’m looking forward to continuing to work together to see what else we can accomplish this year.

Our work continues now as we consider 19 bipartisan bills to reauthorize or create several important public health programs. This Subcommittee will hear from a diverse panel of expert witnesses representing families affected by mental health trauma and discrimination.

I’m pleased that we will be discussing H.R. 6829, the cardiomyopathy Health Education, Awareness, Research, and Training in Schools Act, or HEARTS Act, which I introduced in December.

The HEARTS Act will save lives by increasing awareness of cardiomyopathy and helping prepare schools to deal with cardiac emergencies when they occur. When I announced the introduction of this bill, I was joined by members of two New Jersey families that each tragically lost a young son to this condition during high school sporting events. The legislation directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop guidelines on the placement of automated external defibrillators, or AEDs, in schools, and to provide resources to help schools create and implement a cardiac emergency response plan. The use of AEDs during a cardiac emergency increases the chance of survival from 5 percent to over 50 percent, which could save up to 40,000 lives each year.

Aside from the HEARTs Act, there are many bills before us today that reauthorize important public health initiatives. I’ll start with the need to reauthorize several Autism spectrum disorder programs, as Autism is one of the fastest-growing developmental disorders, affecting 1 in 36 children in our nation. Today we will hear the impact of three important bills to extend funding for family-led organizations to help children with special health care needs. The

bills reauthorize crucial research, training, and monitoring for Autism research until 2029, and reauthorize respite care provided to children and adults with special needs.

Another challenge before us is helping Americans with Alzheimer's disease. We know an estimated 6.7 million Americans over the age of 65 are living with Alzheimer's dementia, and it is the fifth-leading cause of death for people 65 and older. We will discuss three bills that will support continued coordination of federal planning to promote healthy aging, bolster the National Alzheimer's Project, and support early detection, diagnosis, and dementia caregiving.

We are also discussing legislation that would provide support to our nation's health care providers, who have experienced unprecedented levels of stress and burnout that was only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Today we will hear directly from a family who has turned tragedy into life-saving relief for our health care professionals by creating a program to implement evidence-based strategies to reduce and prevent suicide, burnout, and substance use disorders among those who are on the front lines of patient care.

We will also examine bills to reauthorize grant funding for improving Emergency Medical Services in rural areas, supporting our Poison Control grant program, and providing states with access to services and support for people with Traumatic Brain Injuries. And we will discuss bipartisan bills to support a broad variety of public health initiatives focused on stillbirth, Down Syndrome and cancer screenings for women.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the impact these programs have on the American people and our overall public health infrastructure.

And with that, I yield back the balance of my time.