

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**

Hearing on “Healthier America: Legislative Proposals to Improve Public Health”

April 15, 2026

I’m pleased we’re here today to discuss important legislation, but we cannot ignore what Republicans are doing to Americans’ health care while touting bipartisanship. The Republicans’ Big Ugly Bill cut more than a trillion dollars from Americans’ health care, insurance premiums spiked for 20 million people because Republicans refused to extend the ACA tax credits, 15 million people are projected to lose their health care altogether, and hospitals are closing in record numbers across the country. There was a report yesterday in my home state of New Jersey that there are 15 hospitals that could face closure because of the Big Ugly Bill. And now there are reports that Republicans intend to make further cuts and take health care away from more people to pay for Trump’s war in Iran. In Trump’s America, we can’t afford health care, but apparently, we can spend a billion dollars a day in a war with Iran. In fact, Trump himself said that it’s not possible for the federal government to pay for Medicaid and Medicare when we’re fighting wars.

So that’s the environment in which we’re meeting here to consider a number of bipartisan bills to reauthorize important public health programs, including the School-Based Health Centers Reauthorization, led by my colleague Representative Tonko. School-based health centers fill an important need by bringing health care right into schools. By providing a combination of primary care, mental health care, case management, dental health, and nutrition education directly, school-based health centers reduce barriers to care, particularly for children who don’t have access to a family doctor.

We will discuss two bills that aim to expand access to care at community health centers. The Expanding Community Access to Health Services Act would increase access to mental health and substance use services and provide funding for health centers that don’t already offer these services.

We are also considering language that would expand nutrition education and counseling at health centers. Nutrition is a huge component of overall health, and I support the intention of integrating these services in a more comprehensive manner. However, I am concerned that the draft in its current form draws on existing funds for health centers. I hope that the Chairman and I can work together to ensure that this initiative would not in any way cut funding from existing services.

We will also discuss two bipartisan bills that address very different diseases but share a common mission: saving lives.

About 16 percent of all new breast cancer cases in our nation occur in women younger than 50, where it's likely to be found at a later stage and often more aggressive and harder to treat. The EARLY Act supports CDC-led education, outreach, and provider training to close detection gaps, empower early action by women, and ultimately save lives.

The Kay Hagan Tick Act, named after the late North Carolina Senator Kay Hagan who passed away in 2019 from a rare tick-borne virus, takes a three-pronged approach to combating tick-related diseases with the hope of helping improve early detection, treatment, and public awareness.

We are also discussing the "ACT for ALS" Act, which we first authorized in 2021 to help foster the development of safe and effective therapies for those afflicted by ALS and other rare neurodegenerative diseases. Today we have the co-founders of I AM ALS here to speak to the impact of the law on patients, caregivers, researchers, and the scientific understanding of ALS and other rare neurodegenerative diseases. Brian Wallach testified before our Committee on this legislation in 2021. Brian, your powerful testimony at that time, along with your advocacy, played a critical role in getting the legislation passed and signed into law. It is great to see you, and I am grateful to you for testifying again today.

We will also discuss a bill related to recent FDA guidance on some digital health tools. This guidance provides clarity about FDA's thinking on which clinical decision support software functions and general wellness devices will fall outside the agency's regulatory framework. While I believe some of these technologies are helpful tools for consumers and can help them manage their health, I also believe there are questions around ensuring safety of the products and privacy that need to be addressed so we can protect consumers.

I thank our witnesses for being here and look forward to the discussion. And I yield back the balance of my time.