

November 4, 2019

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
U.S. House of Representatives
2227 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Bilirakis:

On behalf of the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) and our more than 44,000 members, I am writing to express our support for H.R. 4861, the *Effective Suicide Screening and Assessment in the Emergency Department Act of 2019*, which would help address the growing epidemic of suicides in the United States.

As you know, suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States, currently ranking tenth among known causes, having claimed more than 47,000 lives in 2017 alone. Moreover, from 2001 to 2017, the suicide rate in the U.S. has increased by an alarming 31 percent, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

Emergency departments often provide care for people at-risk for suicide, such as patients with serious mental illness, substance use disorders or chronic pain. Yet, up to 70 percent of patients who leave the emergency department after a suicide attempt never attend their initial outpatient appointment. Further, a 2016 study estimated that suicidal ideation is present in approximately 11 percent of emergency department patients, but only 3 percent are identified by screening. Research conducted by ENA identified opportunities for improvement in the screening of at-risk patients, recommending the use of screening tools throughout the emergency department visit.

The Effective Suicide Screening and Assessment in the Emergency Department Act of 2019 takes important steps to assist hospitals to enhance their care for patients at risk of suicide. This bill would establish a new grant program to assist emergency departments in developing policies and procedures for the identification, assessment and treatment of high-risk individuals, as well as developing best practices for discharge procedures and follow-up care for these patients.

In addition, funding under the program can be used for the hiring of additional behavioral health professionals and to provide better training for emergency health care providers on identifying and treating high-risk patients. Hospitals can also use the grants for telehealth services for the purpose of increasing access to evidence-based treatments.



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As professionals on the frontlines of our nation's health care system, emergency nurses are critical to providing emergency care to millions of Americans, including to those who are at risk of suicide. We would like to thank you for introducing this legislation and your leadership on this important public health issue. If you have any questions, please contact ENA's Chief Government Relations Officer, Richard Mereu, at 202-741-9373.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Patricia Kunz Howard'. The signature is written in a cursive style.

Patricia Kunz Howard, PhD, RN, CEN, CPEN, TCRN, NE-BC, FAEN, FAAN
2019 ENA President