

January 3, 2020

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

The Honorable Eliot Engel
U.S. House of Representatives
2426 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Bilirakis and Engel,

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition of national organizations representing consumer, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates and other stakeholders, is 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 by improving the identification, assessment and treatment of patients in emergency departments who are at high risk of suicide.

Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the United States, having claimed more than 47,000 lives in 2017 alone. Moreover, from 2001 to 2017, the suicide rate in the U.S. increased by an alarming 31 percent, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

Emergency departments in our nation's hospitals 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 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 11 percent of emergency department patients, but only 3 percent are identified by screening.

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 high risk for suicide. This bill would establish a new grant program to assist emergency departments in implementing policies and procedures for the identification, assessment and treatment of individuals at high-risk of suicide, as well as developing best practices for discharge procedures and follow-up care for those 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.

As organizations leading the fight to improve access to mental health care, MHLG would like to thank you for your leadership on this issue and for introducing this important legislation that enhances the ability of hospitals to identify and treat patients at risk of suicide.

Sincerely,
2020 Mom
American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Centerstone
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies
Council on Social Work Education
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Educational Development Center
Emergency Nurses Association
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International OCD Foundation
The Jewish Federations of North America
The Kennedy Forum
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health (NACBH)
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association for Rural Mental Health (NARMH)
National Association of Social Workers
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Postpartum Support International
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America
School Social Work Association of America
SMART Recovery
Treatment Communities of America
The Trevor Project

CC: Rep. Frank Pallone
Rep. Greg Walden