

Statement for the Record
Congressman Don Beyer (VA-08)
June 30, 2020
The Campaign to Prevention Suicide Act

Chair Eshoo and Ranking Member Burgess:

Thank you for having this important hearing today. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States and the 2nd leading cause of death for 15-34 year-olds. According to the CDC, overall suicide rates increased 35% from 1999 through 2018. Suicide can be prevented, but unfortunately it is still a taboo topic for much of American society. The stigma against discussing suicide and seeking help is a significant barrier to prevention. It's important to tackle this head on.

A change in social norms from a culture of avoidance to a culture of engagement is needed in order to foster encourage those who need help to seek it and eliminate the distinction between mental and physical health. As an example of an existing effort, the United States Air Force Suicide Prevention Program was developed to change the culture surrounding suicide within the organization. Researchers found that the program was associated with a 33% relative risk reduction in suicide.

In addition, suicide prevention is successful when people know how to engage and where to turn for resources. Identifying ways to improve access to timely, affordable, and quality mental health for people in need is a critical component to prevention. And a key part of that is knowing what resources are available. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is one of the most well-known resources to help with suicide prevention. The Federal Communications Commission recently announced that it was moving forward with a new three-digit 9-8-8 number for the Suicide Lifeline to make it easier for people to get help when they are having suicidal thoughts. A previous FCC study of this change identified the importance of an extensive public awareness campaign to publicize the new number.

To address this need, the Campaign to Prevent Suicide would:

- Act to change the culture around suicide so that Americans know to intervene rather than ignore individuals who might be suicidal
- Share information about suicide prevention resources like the Lifeline
- Serve as an awareness campaign for the new 9-8-8 number for the Lifeline
- Educate the media and those using social media on how to talk about suicide with a toolkit

Thank you for taking the time to consider, H.R. 4585, the Campaign to Prevent Suicide Act. I urge my colleagues to favorably report this bipartisan legislation out of committee.

Again, thank you for holding this necessary legislative hearing and your continued leadership on mental health policy especially in this trying time.

Sincerely,

