

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 29, 2020

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden
Ranking Member
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member Walden,

We are writing to urge the Committee on Energy and Commerce to quickly and favorably report out H.R. 4564, the Suicide Prevention Lifeline Reform Act.

Thank you for your leadership on these issues and considering this vital legislation as well as many other noteworthy bills on mental health policy in the legislative hearing on June 30th. We appreciate your commitment to addressing the mental health crisis throughout our country.

Over the next four years the Lifeline expects 12 million calls, the same number of calls it received for the 12-year period between 2005 and 2017. With call volume and call wait times already at unmanageable levels, the growing demand will only further constrain the network and reduce access to this life-saving resource.

Currently, local crisis centers which handle the majority of the calls to the Lifeline, receive small stipends of \$1500 to \$2500 that do not support the calls being answered. In order to handle the rising call volume, local crisis centers need more resources and more funding.

H.R. 4564, the Suicide Prevention Lifeline Improvement Act of 2019 seeks to enhance the Suicide Prevention Lifeline to ensure every caller receives timely, quality support. By increasing Lifeline funding to fortify capacity and ensure quality, by leveraging innovative technologies, and further identifying areas of opportunity to improve our national crisis hotline system, this legislation can save lives.

This legislation would increase funding for the Suicide Prevention Lifeline by \$50 million, in response to a report issued by the FCC last year that detailed the costs associated with assigning the Lifeline a 3-digit number. In that report the FCC concluded that a \$50 million annual authorization is necessary to ensure the Lifeline is able to meet demand and operate effectively with the projected increased call volume. This bill would also require HHS to develop a plan to

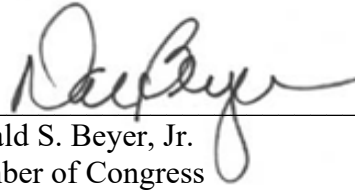
increase quality assurance, eliminate wait times, and implement further best practices to ensure the Lifeline operates effectively and efficiently. A pilot program would also be created to research and employ new technologies to increase suicide prevention efforts. This legislation requires increased coordination and data sharing between the Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the CDC, and requires a study and report to Congress from HHS and GAO on the plan implemented by HHS to reform the Lifeline, to include recommendations for further improvements to the Lifeline.

This bipartisan legislation has been endorsed by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Vibrant, the organization that manages the Lifeline. Thank you for your consideration of this important bill and we urge you to quickly advance the legislation to the House Floor.


Sincerely,



John Katko
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer, Jr.
Member of Congress



Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress