

**Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers**  
**Health Legislative Hearing**  
**Communities in Need: Legislation to Support Mental Health and Well-Being**  
**April 5, 2022**  
*As Prepared for Delivery*

## **INTRO**

Our children are in crisis.  
More high schoolers are unhappy and depressed.

Mental health emergencies are increasing.

Last year, there was a two-and-a-half fold increase in emergency department visits for suicidal ideation and self-harm among children under 18.

It's hard to know where to begin.

I can't help but think that society has led with too much fear. Fear has dominated our lives, especially during the pandemic.

It builds and shuts us down. Fear has been forced on our children.

Government arrogance kept schools closed and made this crisis worse.

This is what we're seeing in our schools in my community. We are not alone.

More screentime during isolation made children more vulnerable to the dangers of Big Tech and social media. It's leading to more stress, anxiety, and depression.

We've seen significant declines in math and reading.

More school violence.

Increases in obesity.

Children have lost motivation because they were shut out of their extracurricular activities and sports.

Many are so lost and feel alone, they are turning to the internet to self-medicate.

This is a story my hometown paper told last week.

- When Freeman High School graduate Rayce Rudeen was away from his Seattle apartment while undergoing opioid use disorder treatment, his family found dozens of illicit pills ordered directly from the internet.
- “It all began with him looking for herbs for his anxiety,” his aunt said. “It ended with us finding fentanyl in every envelope or package, or even in the heels of the shoes in his apartment.”

Six years ago, Rayce overdosed and died. His story has tragically become more common.

Fentanyl seizures are up 1100% in Spokane County.

Spokane County’s overdose deaths have nearly tripled.

Every parent I know is warning their children that one pill they think is Xanax can be laced with a poison that will kill them instantly.

## **WHY?**

We should all be asking why?

What’s making children and young adults feel so broken and alone?

How can hope be restored? How do we stop spreading fear?

I’m glad we are here today to work together and focus on solutions.

## **BILLS**

I want to learn how existing programs are working well.

I'm proud to be leading with Congresswomen Lori Trahan, Young Kim, and Cindy Axne to reauthorize the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act.

It's helped bring additional mental health services to places like Washington State University to support students' mental health and suicide prevention efforts.

I also want to talk about where more must be done.

We should take great care not to establish duplicative programs that compete with existing and effective programs for funding.

While well-intentioned, the creation of new programs H.R. 4944, H.R. 5218, and H.R. 7232 run this risk.

I am especially concerned with H.R. 7254, the Mental Health Justice and Parity Act. It will restrict access to care to patients with serious mental health illness, undermine law enforcement, and ultimately hurt local communities.

We should support—not undermine—the residential and inpatient treatment options that can be the most appropriate place for certain patients to get help.

I look forward to discussing this more, in addition to the many bipartisan solutions that are on the schedule today.

## **MEDICAID**

Finally, I want to speak on a specific problem of the Medicaid IMD exclusion.

Right now, Medicaid cannot pay for inpatient or residential care in facilities with more than 16 beds.

As a result, more people are either incarcerated or homeless when they should be receiving mental health care.

More than one-third of the homeless population has untreated severe mental illness.

We simply do not have enough care settings for these patients.

There are also cases of children being kept in emergency rooms for days because there is nowhere else to send them...

... and foster youth who can't access short term residential treatment.

These problems with Medicaid limiting access to care for vulnerable groups must be addressed...

... especially before the 9-8-8 suicide hotline is implemented this summer.

As more people use this to access emergency mental health care services, we should work together to make sure people on Medicaid aren't locked out of services because facilities with more than 16 beds cannot care for them.

## **CONCLUSION**

With that, I would like to thank all my colleagues for their bipartisan work.

I hope we can continue to build on the progress from this hearing to provide healing to the next generation.

I pray every day for the Lord to shine upon them.

They deserve every chance to thrive... and to know their lives have meaning.

If there's one message we send today to them, it is that— "you matter" and "you aren't alone."

We are going to keep listening, learning, and leading to make sure help is there and a more secure future is around the corner.

Thank you. I yield back.

