

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 8, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

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

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

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member Walden:

The coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency is taking a toll on our constituents' mental well-being and understandably may be stressful for many Americans. We are witnessing how fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in both adults and children. As you prepare future coronavirus stimulus packages, we strongly encourage you to include the following bipartisan bills that can play a critical role in expanding the number of available behavioral and mental health services:

HR 4564, Suicide Prevention Lifeline Improvement Act (Katko, R-NY)

Summary of the bill: The bill would amend the Public Health Service Act to ensure the provision of high-quality service through the Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Specifically, the bill would:

- Increase annual funding for the Suicide Prevention Lifeline from \$12 million to \$50 million;
- Require HHS to develop and implement a plan to increase quality assurance, eliminate call wait times, implement evidence-based practices like follow-up, ensure resources are available to friends and family of those in crisis, and create guidelines to carry out periodic testing of the Lifeline;
- Require increased coordination and data-sharing between the Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the CDC;
- Create a pilot program to research and employ innovative technologies for suicide prevention.

Impact: With call volume and call wait times already at unmanageable levels, this public health emergency will only further constrain the network and reduce access to this life-saving resource. Currently, local crisis centers, which handle many of the calls to the Lifeline, receive small

stipends of \$1500 to \$2500, which are insufficient to support the calls being answered. In order to handle the rising call volume, local crisis centers need more resources and more funding. The Suicide Prevention Lifeline Improvement Act would dramatically expand the services needed to assist those in crisis and ensure they receive the help needed in a timely manner.

HR 1109, Mental Health Services for Students Act (Napolitano, D-CA)

Summary of the bill: The bill would provide \$200 million in competitive grants for public schools across the country to partner with local mental health professionals to establish comprehensive mental health services for students.

Impact: According to the National Institute of Mental Health, approximately one in five youth will experience some type of mental health disorder that can cause significant challenges at home, school, and their community. Yet, prior to this public health emergency, only 10 percent of children and adolescents ages 3 to 17-years-old received any treatment or counseling from a mental health professional.

This bill, which is based on the successful Youth Suicide Prevention Program in Los Angeles County, would provide grant funding for public schools to ensure the long-term availability of mental health services for students. Regular classes will eventually resume and according to the CDC, children may feel upset or have other strong emotions after an emergency. How a child reacts can vary depending on their age, previous experiences, and how that child typically copes with stress. Congress must act to ensure schools can help students process the damage caused by this pandemic.

We would truly appreciate your continued commitment to mental health by including these key bills in any future coronavirus stimulus packages.

Sincerely,



Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Mental Health Caucus



John Katko
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Mental Health Caucus