

June 29, 2020

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Chairman  
House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Anna Eshoo  
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Health  
House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Michael C. Burgess  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Health  
House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone, Ranking Member Walden, Subcommittee Chairwoman Eshoo, and Subcommittee Ranking Member Burgess:

On behalf of the undersigned national mental health and education nonprofits, we express our strong support for Congressmen Scott Peters' (D-CA-52) and Gus Bilirakis' (R-FL-12) bipartisan H.R. 7293, the Suicide Training and Awareness Nationally Delivered for Universal Prevention (STANDUP) Act. This legislation will help prevent youth suicides by encouraging local, state, and tribal education agencies to implement student suicide awareness and prevention training policies for grades six through twelve.

Since 2010, suicide has been the second-leading cause of death for young Americans ages 10-24. Particularly disturbing is the number of suicides has nearly tripled since 2007 for children aged 10-14.<sup>1</sup> From 2007 to 2015, the number of children and teens visiting the emergency room for suicide-related injuries doubled.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, 517 Americans aged 10-14 and 6,252 aged 15-24 died by suicide.<sup>3</sup> A recent study by Trust for America's Health and Well Being Trust published in October 2019 found that adolescent suicide rates for young people ages 12-19 increased by 87% from 2007 to 2017.<sup>4</sup>

As the youth suicide crisis has worsened over the past decade, certain communities have borne the brunt of this tragic escalation. Trust for America's Health and Well Being Trust report that suicide rates among American Indian and Alaskan Native adolescents (ages 15-19) are 60% higher than the national average for all teenagers.<sup>5</sup> Further, 48% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents report considering or attempting suicide.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ten Leading Causes of Death and Injury Charts, Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/LeadingCauses.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ashley Welch, ER visits for suicidal thoughts, attempts doubled among youth in recent years, study finds. CBS News, April 9, 2019. Available at <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/er-visits-for-suicidal-thoughts-attempts-doubled-among-youths-in-recent-years-studyfinds/>

<sup>3</sup> Ten Leading Causes of Death and Injury Charts, Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/LeadingCauses.html>

<sup>4</sup> Olson, G., De Biasi, A., Ilakkuvan, V., & Auerbach, J. (2019). Addressing a Crisis: Cross-Sector Strategies to Prevent Adolescent Substance Use and Suicide. Available at [https://www.tfah.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/TFAH2019TeensPainRptFINAL10\\_24.pdf](https://www.tfah.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/TFAH2019TeensPainRptFINAL10_24.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Before suicides occur, there are often warning signs present. Research shows that 70% of those who die by suicide tell someone beforehand or give another warning sign.<sup>7</sup> Given the high prevalence rate of warning signs, suicide awareness and prevention trainings may mitigate youth suicides. For example, a randomized control study found a 40% drop in suicide attempts in schools that implemented the Signs of Suicide Prevention Program.<sup>8</sup> By educating and empowering students to recognize the signs of suicidal ideation in themselves and their peers, these trainings can help schools and adolescents within them identify at-risk individuals, connect them to care, and avert tragedy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened concerns around the mental health of Americans. According to the Well Being Trust, an approximately 75,000 additional suicides are estimated to be associated with COVID-19. Of that number, approximately 4,000 will be youths<sup>9</sup> and children are twice as likely to visit the emergency room for considering or attempting suicide. Now more than ever, it is important to keep hospital beds available for COVID-19 patients and to continue community mitigation strategies. However, studies of previous pandemics, such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), have shown that children experience increased levels of anxiety, confusion, and stress from these strategies designed to address public health pandemics.<sup>10</sup> While these strategies are necessary to combat a public health crisis such as COVID-19, it is incumbent upon us to provide supports for young individuals facing unprecedented circumstances.

The STANDUP Act encourages more SEAs, TEAs, and LEAs to implement life-saving policies by conditioning the receipt of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) 520A discretionary grants that are implemented within schools, including Project AWARE. These conditions require grant recipients commit to implement suicide awareness and prevention training policies for grades 6-12 within 3 years of award receipt. The legislation provides flexibility in implementing these policies while encouraging their broader adoption by setting minimum standards for the policies, without requiring specific delivery methods or hours of training. Additionally, the legislation would create a listing of programs that can be used to fulfill these requirements, including programs that are available at no cost. In order to ensure grantees are adequately supported, SAMHSA is required to provide ongoing best practices, training, and technical assistance to local, state, or tribal education agencies implementing suicide awareness and prevention training policies under this legislation.

We appreciate your commitment to keeping America's youth safe and expanding the use of policies that are proven to save lives. We urge the Committee and House Leadership to act on H.R. 7293 and bring the bill forward for consideration.

Sincerely,

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<sup>7</sup> Robins, E., Gassner, S., Kayes, J., Wilkinson, R.H., & Murphy, G.E. (1959). The communication of suicidal intent: A study of 134 consecutive cases of successful (completed) suicide. *Am J Psychiatry*, 115(8), 724-733.

<sup>8</sup> Aseltine RH, Jr, DeMartino R. An outcome evaluation of the SOS suicide prevention program. *Am J Public Health* (2004) 94:446– 51. 10.2105/AJPH.94.3.446

<sup>9</sup> Petterson, Steve et al. "Projected Deaths of Despair During the Coronavirus Recession," Well Being Trust. May 8, 2020. WellBeingTrust.org.

<sup>10</sup> Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress. Mental health and behavioral guidelines for response to a pandemic flu outbreak. Available at: <http://www.usuhs.mil/psy/CSTSPandemicAvianInfluenza.pdf>. Accessed July 28, 2009.

American Art Therapy Association  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Association of Suicidology  
American Counseling Association  
American Dance Therapy Association  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Psychological Association  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Clinical Social Work Association  
Coalition for Juvenile Justice  
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning  
Committee for Children  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition  
Education Development Center  
Families USA

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice  
International OCD Foundation  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
The Kennedy Forum  
Mental Health America  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Development Disability Directors  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Board for Certified Counselors  
National Eating Disorders Association  
National Education Association  
National Federation for Children's Mental Health  
National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform  
National PTA  
National Register of Health Service Psychologists  
Postpartum Support International  
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium  
Sandy Hook Promise

SARDAA Schizophrenia and Related Disorders

Alliance of America

SchoolHouse Connection

School Social Work Association of America

AASA School Superintendents Association

Treatment Communities of America

The Trevor Project