

April 21, 2021

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
U.S. Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Angus King
U.S. Senate
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Murkowski and King,

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates and other stakeholders, is writing to express our support for S. 467, the Effective Suicide Screening and Assessment in the Emergency Department Act of 2021, which would help address the growing epidemic of suicides in the United States by improving the identification, assessment and treatment of patients in emergency departments who are at high risk of suicide.

Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the United States, having claimed more than 47,000 lives in 2018 alone. Moreover, from 2000 to 2018, the suicide rate in the U.S. increased by an alarming 36 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The COVID-19 pandemic will no doubt exacerbate this disturbing trend. In fact, the CDC reported in August that one-quarter of young adults aged 18 to 24 had seriously considered suicide in the previous 30 days.

Emergency departments in our nation's hospitals often provide care for people at-risk for suicide, such as patients with serious mental illness, substance use disorders or chronic pain. Yet, up to 70 percent who leave the emergency department after a suicide attempt never attend their initial outpatient appointment. Further, a 2016 study estimated that suicidal ideation is present in 11 percent of emergency department patients, but only 3 percent are identified by screening.

The Effective Suicide Screening and Assessment in the Emergency Department Act of 2021 takes important steps to assist hospitals to enhance their care for patients at high risk for suicide. This bill would establish a new grant program to assist emergency departments in implementing policies and procedures for the identification, assessment and treatment of individuals at high-risk of suicide, as well as developing best practices for discharge procedures and follow-up care for those patients.

In addition, funding under the program can be used for the hiring of additional behavioral health professionals and to provide better training for emergency health care providers on identifying and treating high-risk patients. Hospitals can also use the grants for telehealth services for the purpose of increasing access to evidence-based treatments.

As organizations leading the fight to improve access to mental health care, MHLG would like to thank you for your leadership on this issue and for introducing this important legislation that enhances the ability of hospitals to identify and treat patients at risk of suicide.

Sincerely,
2020 Mom

American Academy of Pediatrics
American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Nurses Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Centerstone
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies
Council on Social Work Education
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Educational Development Center
Emergency Nurses Association
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International OCD Foundation
The Jewish Federations of North America
The Kennedy Forum
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health (NACBH)
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association for Rural Mental Health (NARMH)
National Association of Social Workers
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Postpartum Support International

Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America
School Social Work Association of America
SMART Recovery
Treatment Communities of America
The Trevor Project
Wounded Warrior Project

CC:

Sen. Patty Murray
Sen. Richard Burr