

April 8, 2024

The Honorable David Trone
2404 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Brian Fitzpatrick
271 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jamie Raskin
2242 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Trone, Representative Raskin, and Representative Fitzpatrick:

On behalf of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) – a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, families, mental health and addiction providers, advocates and other stakeholders committed to strengthening access to high-quality mental and behavioral health care – we write to express strong support for H.R.6928, the *CONtinuity in Necessary Evaluative Crisis Treatment (CONNECT) Act*. We are grateful for your ongoing commitment to improving crisis response services in the United States.

The reintroduction of this bill comes at a critical time. In 2021, the United States lost 48,183 individuals to suicide, with provisional data indicating a 2.6% increase in suicide deaths for 2022.ⁱ In addition, one in every five adults experience mental illness each year in the United States, but fewer than half of all adults in the U.S. with a mental illness received treatment in 2021.ⁱⁱ

The *CONNECT Act* will authorize grant funding opportunities to help crisis centers provide follow-up treatment for individuals receiving suicide prevention and crisis intervention services. Eligible grant recipients will receive funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to help provide follow-up services, including check-ins to assess wellbeing and level of risk; outreach to ensure engagement in services and supports; collaboration with family, caregivers, and natural social supports; and referrals based on the individual's needed level of care.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) states that a comprehensive crisis response system should include follow up and follow through services to engage individuals in crisis with local behavioral health services.ⁱⁱⁱ Research has indicated that nearly 80% of follow-up clients report that intervention helped prevent them from attempting suicide and over 90% said it kept them safe, demonstrating that follow-up is a critical intervention to help support individuals at risk of suicide.^{iv}

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline represents a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build out the nation's behavioral health crisis care response system. Efficient and effective follow-up for those who seek crisis services is necessary to support this goal. The *CONNECT Act* is vital to saving lives and enhancing the 988 crisis care system.

Thank you for your continued commitment to improving America's crisis response systems, and we look forward to working with you to advance this important legislation.

Sincerely,

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association on Health and Disability
American Counseling Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association Services
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare (AABH)
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Crisis Residential Association
Crisis Text Line
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
Inseparable
International OCD Foundation
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance for Mental Illness
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors (NACBHDD)
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health
Postpartum Support International
Psychotherapy Action Network
RI International
Sandy Hook Promise
SMART Recovery
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
The Trevor Project
Trust for America's Health
Youth Villages

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Provisional Suicide Deaths in the United States. (2022.) <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2023/s0810-US-Suicide-Deaths-2022.html>.

ⁱⁱ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2021.) 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health Annual National Report. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt39443/2021NSDUHFFRRev010323.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2020.) National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care Best Practice Toolkit. <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/national-guidelines-for-behavioral-health-crisis-care-02242020.pdf>

^{iv} Madelyn Gould; et al. Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior, February 2022. "Third-Party Callers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Seeking Assistance on Behalf of People at Imminent Risk of Suicide." <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/sltb.12339>.