

October 29, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
U.S. Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
U.S. Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr,

On behalf of the undersigned national nursing organizations, we urge you to support the immediate consideration and passage of S. 467, the Effective Suicide Screening and Assessment in the Emergency Department Act, which would help address the growing epidemic of suicides gripping the nation. This legislation creates a program to assist hospital emergency departments in developing protocols for identifying and treating patients who are at risk for suicide.

This bill was introduced on February 25, 2021, by Senator Lisa Murkowski and Senator Angus King. Its House companion, H.R. 1324, was approved together with 15 other bills on a 349-74 bipartisan vote on May 12. In the previous congress, the same bill was passed by a voice vote in the House on September 29, 2020, but it was not considered in the Senate.

As you know, suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States, currently ranking tenth among known causes, having claimed more than 47,000 lives in 2019 alone. Risk factors like social isolation and economic stress are very much a feature of the COVID-19 pandemic and are expected to contribute to a sharp spike in suicides in the coming years. A CDC report in released in August 2020 found that 41 percent of adults in the US reported at least on adverse mental health disorder. Moreover, one-quarter of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 said they had “seriously considered” suicide in the previous 30 days. Another CDC report found a 39 percent increase in visits to emergency departments for suspected suicide attempts among 12–17-year-olds during February-March 2021 as compared to the same period a year earlier.

Even before the pandemic, the U.S. was experiencing a suicide crisis. From 2000 to 2019, the suicide rate in the U.S. increased by an alarming 33 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Hospital emergency departments 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 hospital after a suicide attempt never

attend their initial outpatient appointment. Further, a 2016 study estimated that suicidal ideation is present in 11 percent of patients who seek medical assistance at the emergency department, but only 3 percent are identified by screening.

The Effective Suicide Screening and Assessment in the Emergency Department Act (S. 467/H.R. 1324) will enhance the care received by patients with suicidal ideation. The bill would establish a new grant program to assist hospital emergency departments in developing policies and procedures for the identification and treatment of high-risk individuals, as well as developing best practices for discharge procedures 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 patients who are at high risk for suicide.

As nursing organizations dedicated to improving our nation's health care system and improving treatment for those suffering from mental illnesses, including to those who are at high risk for suicide, we request you bring forth this important bipartisan bill for passage in the United States Senate. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Academy of Neonatal Nursing
American Academy of Emergency Nurse Practitioners
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Critical-Care Nurses
American Nurses Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Society for Pain Management Nursing
American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses
Association for Radiologic & Imaging Nursing
Association of Veterans Affairs Nurse Anesthetists
Commissioned Officers Association of the USPHS
Emergency Nurses Association
Friends of the National Institute of Nursing Research
Gerontological Advance Practice Nurses Association
Infusion Nurses Society
International Association of Forensic Nurses
International Society of Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses
National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Nurses
National Black Nurses Association
National Hartford Center of Gerontological Nursing Excellence
National League for Nursing
National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs
Pediatric Endocrinology Nursing Society