

6276

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Chairwoman Gerratana, Chairman Ritter, and Committee Members:

I am a Connecticut resident and volunteer field advocate for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP). I am also a priest who has counseled people that have attempted suicide or were in the grip of suicidal ideation. Additionally, I have pastored to those mourning the loss of loved ones who ended their lives by suicide. I urge you to pass out of committee Bill 6276, which would further train health care professionals in suicide prevention.

I support Bill 6276 because I have seen the impact of suicide on the lives of young people. As the school minister at small private high school, I had to announce to the school that a recent graduate had ended his life just weeks into his first year at college. The impact of his loss affected not just his friends and family, but even those who had never met him. Perhaps more than any other age group young people struggle to understand why a peer would end his or her life. At that time, students of all backgrounds told me stories of others they knew who died by suicide. Because of what these young people said, I strongly support legislation such as Bill 6276 because requiring those in the health care profession to complete training in suicide prevention will help stop people from ending their lives by suicide.

Suicide is not something many people understand. Most people would rather not talk about it. These are reasons why it is important to train and educate those who are “first-responders” not just in the mental health profession, but also all health care workers. As an AFSP volunteer, I’ve come to understand that **suicide is a public health crisis**. Approximately 90% of individuals who die by suicide were living with a mental illness at the time of their death, often undiagnosed depression or bipolar disorder.^[i] Since I’ve been a priest, I’ve learned that **suicide is preventable**. One of the best ways to prevent suicide is by understanding and treating mental illnesses.

You may wonder just how much of a problem suicide is for young people and, in particular, those who live in Connecticut. According to the latest (2013) data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people ages 10-24 across the United States.^[ii] In Connecticut, suicide is the *third* leading cause of death for children, teens and young adults ages 10-24 and the *second* leading cause of death for ages 25-34. The concern goes beyond those who complete suicide. According to the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, more than 1 in 6 high school students in the U.S. reported having seriously considered attempting suicide in the 12 months preceding the survey. Additionally, 8% of students (about 1 in 12) reported having attempted suicide in the preceding 12 months.^[iii]

This bill is important to pass because it will save lives, but it will be stronger—and save more lives—if you amend it to reflect to the lifespan. I ask that you delete the word *youth* from the bill’s language. Regardless, please support Bill 6276. It will provide essential training and education to those professionals who can help people in terrible need. Thank you for your consideration.

^[i] National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Numbers Count: Mental Disorders in America. [online]. Available from URL:

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/the-numbers-count-mental-disorders-in-america/index.shtml>.

^[ii] Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: WISQARS Leading Causes for Death Reports, National and Regional, 1999-2013. Retrieved March 2, 2015 from

http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/leadcaus10_us.html.

^[iii] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Available at

<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>. Accessed on March 2, 2015.