

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 1, 2022

The Honorable Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Dr. Walensky:

We write to you as one of the leading government agencies dedicated to improving mental health outcomes of children in America and ask that you work with us to address this long-standing problem that was worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has not released data for suicide rates among children for 2021. While we note the provisional data has been released, we ask why the CDC has not released the final data that is a critical indicator of our children's mental health.

Childhood is a critical period to prevent and treat mental health. Half of all mental illness occurs before a person turns 14 years old.¹ The number of children admitted to children's hospitals for thoughts of suicide or self-harm has doubled since 2016. Clearly, even before the pandemic, America was experiencing a mental health crisis among children and adolescents.

The pandemic further exacerbated this problem and strained the healthcare system, leaving children to struggle with unmet mental health needs. During the pandemic, school closures, social restrictions, and disrupted routines placed considerable stress on children and their families. These developments limited access to many resources children rely on to cope with stress and anxiety. These statistics are frightening and breathtaking. From mid-March 2020 into October of that year, when compared to 2019, mental health-related emergency department visits among children ages 5-11 years increased by 24%. For adolescent children aged 12-17 they increased by 31% for the same period.²

The suicide statistics are even more appalling. According to a May 2020 CDC study, emergency department visits for suicide attempts among adolescents ages 12-17 was 39% higher than the same period during 2019.³ The problem is compounded by the fact that in the United States suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among youth ages 15-24.⁴

The data shows the scope of the crisis we are facing. If we are to better meet the needs of our children we must take long overdue steps to strengthen our mental health infrastructure. This must be a top priority.

We stand ready to work with you to meet these challenges.

Sincerely,



BRYAN STEIL
Member of Congress

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/quiz/index.htm>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm>

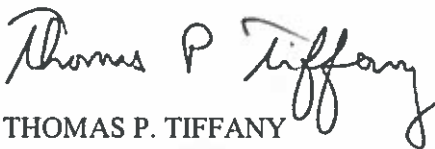
⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/quiz/index.htm>



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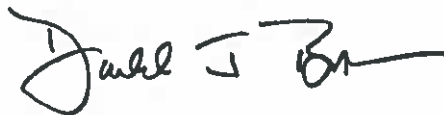
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