

May 23, 2024

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chairman
Senate Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, MD
Ranking Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy,

On behalf of the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) and our nearly 40,000 members, thank you for holding today's markup to consider the "Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Reauthorization Act" (S. 3679), as well as the "Emergency Medical Services for Children Reauthorization Act" (S. 3766), and legislation to reauthorize our nation's poison control centers (S. 4351), among others. These important programs are vital components of our health care safety net, and we appreciate the Committee's attention to these critical reauthorization efforts.

As you know, S. 3679 is named in honor of emergency physician and longtime ACEP member Lorna Breen, MD, FACEP, who died by suicide in April 2020 after treating COVID19 patients and contracting the virus herself. Dr. Breen was the chair of the Department of Emergency Medicine at the New York Presbyterian Allen Hospital. She had been an ACEP member for 15 years and served on our Emergency Medicine Practice Committee where she spearheaded the development of a Point of Care tool for patients with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Dr. Breen was also active in her state chapter and served on the New York ACEP Board of Directors from 2007 to 2010. Most importantly, she was a sister, a daughter, a friend, and a colleague.

As you well know, the stigma surrounding mental illness is a well-known barrier to seeking care among the general population, but it can have an even stronger impact among health care professionals who even still face greater and increasing rates of mental and behavioral health conditions, suicide, and burnout than other professions. For most physicians and other clinicians, seeking treatment for mental health sparks legitimate fear of resultant loss of licensure (some state licensing boards continue to ask questions about clinicians' mental health histories or past treatment), loss of credentialing at your site of employment (for similar reasons), loss of income, or other meaningful career setbacks as a result of pervasive stigma. Such fears have deterred many from accessing necessary mental health care, leaving them to suffer in silence, or worse. However, thanks to the work of many physicians, health care workers, organizations, and other stakeholders, there have been several successful efforts to eliminate some of the barriers related to licensure, certification, and registration for physicians, and numerous efforts continue on this front at the state level.

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The law that bears Dr. Breen's name honors her life and legacy, and as of today more than \$100 million has been distributed to 44 organizations to improve access to mental health services and resources for physicians and health care providers across the nation. S. 3679 reauthorizes the law's critical programs through fiscal year 2029 and sets them on a traditional five-year authorization process, ensuring necessary and continued support for health care workers' wellbeing. ACEP is especially grateful for the continued commitment of Senators Tim Kaine (D-VA) and Todd Young (R-IN) in their efforts to reauthorize this critical law, and we urge Congress to swiftly take up and pass this vital legislation.

With regard to the "Emergency Medical Services for Children Reauthorization Act" (S. 3765), the Emergency Medical Services for Children (EMSC) program helps ensure emergency departments and ambulances have the equipment, supplies, and medications necessary to treat children and helps develop pediatric treatment protocols. As the exclusive federal initiative focused on enhancing emergency services for the pediatric population, EMSC has been pivotal in transforming pediatric emergency care across the United States and has directed crucial focus and funding towards a group that was once overlooked and has unique health considerations and needs. Providing continued stability and certainty for EMSC means that emergency physicians can help ensure that emergency departments and EMS systems are equipped with child-appropriate medical equipment, health care workers are well-trained in pediatric care, and research and policies are directed towards optimizing emergency care for children.

Finally, we appreciate your inclusion of S. 4351 to reauthorize critical poison control programs. ACEP strongly supports the availability of high-quality, fully funded, certified poison centers. This legislation will provide critical support for the nation's poison centers and to all Americans who rely upon the excellence, experience, and resources of these centers during an emergency. Emergency physicians witness first-hand the consequences of intentional and accidental access to poisons and other lethal substances, and we strongly support the work done by our colleagues in poison control centers throughout the country.

Once again, we appreciate your attention to these critical issues, and we are grateful for the opportunity to share our support. Should you have any questions or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Ryan McBride, ACEP Congressional Affairs Director, at rmcbride@acep.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A Terry".

Aisha T. Terry, MD, MPH, FACEP
ACEP President