

TO: The House Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Michaela Cook, LICSW

RE: Support for H7946, The Protect Mental Health Act

Dear Chairman and honorable members of the committee:

Thank you for taking the time to consider my written personal and professional testimony today, in support of **H7946, The Protect Mental Health Act**.

My name is Michaela Cook, I currently reside in Cranston, RI. I write to you today as a volunteer field advocate for the RI Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. I am also a long-term survivor of suicide loss; a mental health consumer and a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker for individuals and families across the state. My personal journey of loss and healing began on October 31, 2003, when I lost my best friend and college sweetheart, Jonathan Bagley to a death by suicide. Since that day, my life's work has been invested in my own recovery from post-traumatic stress disorder and helping others heal through their own symptoms and loss of loved ones to suicide; along with unpacking all the external factors we face in our world today. This testimony can only touch upon a few of the impacts we all are non-exempt or immune to at this time.

The fact that healthcare costs have risen immensely in the 'medical realm' ultimately impacts the 'mental wellness' realm of life, as we are not compartmentalized pieces of medical issues vs. our mental health problems – we are connected by our brain, body and mind, simply said, as humans.

Without strong support of this piece of legislation, these concerns become crucial when care or access to care is not a priority on both levels. Everyone has thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are unilaterally shared with our bodies, symptoms, and circumstances. It's important to push forward with this as it can't be reduced from quality of care to quantity of care as they are not the same. They can be considered essential care with support for **H7946, The Protect Mental Health Act**.

We have surely made meaningful progress since my own healing journey began two decades ago however there's still much progress to be made. I urge the committee to also consider this quote today by Shannon L. Alder that encompasses Mental Health Parity: "Never give up on someone with mental illness. When 'I' is replaced by 'We', illness becomes Wellness."

You have the ability to make this happen with your support as well.

Respectfully,

Michaela Cook, LICSW

Field Advocate, AFSP Rhode Island