

## **Protect The Mental Health of Our Nation's First Responders**

### **Cosponsor H.R. 1646, the Helping Emergency Responders Overcome (HERO) Act**

Dear Colleague,

I invite you to join me in cosponsoring H.R. 1646, the Helping Emergency Responders Overcome (HERO) Act.

First responders are particularly vulnerable to suicide. Firefighters, police, and paramedics rush to the scene of fires, violent crimes, and accidents, and often confront stressful and life-threatening situations. Exposure to traumatic events can impact mental health. Multiple studies have found that first responders have higher rates of suicide than other professions.

But the scope of the problem, as well as what makes particular first responders vulnerable to suicide, isn't fully known. H.R. 1646 would require the HHS Secretary to report to Congress on the number of suicides by first responders in a given calendar year, and include risk factors, recommendations for further study, and possible interventions to reduce suicide among first responders.

The HERO Act also includes critical prevention and treatment strategies. The legislation establishes a grant program to provide training for firefighters and emergency medical service personnel to serve as peer counselors. These peer counselors would be embedded within local fire stations and fire and EMS departments, and assist other firefighters and emergency medical personnel with behavioral health issues. It also requires HHS to develop resources to educate mental health professionals about the culture of local, state, and federal fire and EMS departments. Finally, the legislation directs the HHS Secretary to develop, assemble, and distribute best practices on the identification, prevention, and treatment of posttraumatic stress among first responders.

I urge you to join me in supporting this critical legislation to measure, reduce, and treat mental health issues among first responders. Please contact Ryan Uyehara at [ryan.uyehara@mail.house.gov](mailto:ryan.uyehara@mail.house.gov), or call 202-225-5716 to co-sponsor the HERO Act.

Sincerely,

Ami Bera, M.D.

Member of Congress