

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Health Chairwoman Anna G. Eshoo

Hearing on “Caring for America: Legislation to Support Patients, Caregivers, and Providers”

October 26, 2021

In the first year of the pandemic, over 3,600 U.S. healthcare workers died fighting Covid-19, according to the Guardian and Kaiser Health News, and since February 2020, about 1 in 5 healthcare workers have quit their jobs. For those still on the job, almost all report experiencing stress and most report being emotionally and physically exhausted.

As a country, we’ve responded with mostly symbolic support – ticker tape parades, “healthcare hero” yard signs, and *Time Magazine* dedicating its cover to frontline health workers. Congress provided federal aid to support health care institutions under the \$175-billion Provider Relief Fund, but it’s been difficult to track how much of that aid made it to the workers themselves. On the West Coast, more than 24,000 nurses and other healthcare workers have authorized a strike over pay and working conditions.

Public health workers as well as doctors and nurses also report being physically threatened. In my district, Dr. Sara Cody, the top Santa Clara County public health official was stalked and threatened over her decisions to protect public health during the pandemic, and Asian-American healthcare workers have faced a new wave of racial harassment in the workplace during Covid-19.

This is the urgent backdrop of our hearing today.

We’re considering seven bills, five of which are bipartisan, focused on supporting current caregivers as well as rebuilding the pipeline of future workers.

Three of the bills set up loan repayment programs for the healthcare workforce which will directly reward future workers for their important contributions.

Two other bills, the *Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act* and the *Alzheimer’s Caregiver Support Act* recognize that current caregivers need stronger support to help them weather their physically and emotionally draining work.

Our Subcommittee is honored to welcome Mr. Corey Feist and Ms. Jennifer Breen Feist. They are the brother-in-law and sister of Dr. Lorna Breen who died by suicide after experiencing the mass death of the first wave of Covid-19 patients and then contracting the virus herself. Since their sister’s death, they’ve dedicated themselves to addressing clinician burnout and suicide.

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The *Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Act* provides grant funding for suicide-prevention and peer-support at healthcare facilities. It also helps to make sure that healthcare professionals can ask for mental health help without facing negative consequences in their careers.

We're also honored to welcome back to the Congress Ms. Stephanie Monroe, who served as Chief Counsel to the Senate HELP Committee during her 25-year-career on the Hill. Ms. Monroe now serves as the Executive Director of AfricanAmericansAgainstAlzheimers and is the current caregiver for her 84-year-old father who is living with Alzheimer's.

She'll testify in support of the *Alzheimer's Caregiver Support Act*, which provides grants to expand support services for the unpaid caregivers of people living with Alzheimer's and other dementia.

The final two bills being considered will reauthorize grants and fellowship programs for clinicians in medically underserved communities and volunteers for Community Health Centers.

This hearing is a first step towards treating our nation's healthcare workers as heroes. I look forward to today's expert testimony and to moving these important bills through our Subcommittee as swiftly as possible.