

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 666

To increase access to mental health, substance use, and counseling services
for first responders, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 20, 2025

Mrs. GILLIBRAND (for herself and Mr. HAWLEY) introduced the following bill;
which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Edu-
cation, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To increase access to mental health, substance use, and
counseling services for first responders, and for other
purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “First Responders
5 Wellness Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FIRST RESPONDERS MENTAL HEALTH HOTLINE.**

7 Part P of title III of the Public Health Service Act
8 (42 U.S.C. 280g et seq.) is amended by adding at the end
9 the following:

1 **“SEC. 399V-8. FIRST RESPONDERS MENTAL HEALTH HOT-**
 2 **LINE.**

3 “(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 2 years after the
 4 date of enactment of the First Responders Wellness Act,
 5 the Secretary, acting through the Assistant Secretary for
 6 Mental Health and Substance Use, shall maintain, directly
 7 or by contract or grant, a national first responders emer-
 8 gency hotline to provide peer and emotional support, infor-
 9 mation, brief intervention, and mental and behavioral
 10 health and substance use disorder resources and referrals
 11 to first responders and to their families or household mem-
 12 bers.

13 “(b) REQUIREMENTS FOR HOTLINE.—The hotline
 14 established under subsection (a) shall—

15 “(1) operate as a separate, widely recognizable
 16 number with bidirectional transfer options with the
 17 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline established pursuant
 18 to section 520E-3;

19 “(2) provide toll-free, real-time, live assistance
 20 24/7;

21 “(3) provide voice and text support;

22 “(4) be sufficiently staffed by, at a minimum,
 23 culturally competent first responder peer specialists
 24 or first responder mental health services providers
 25 who have distinct knowledge of, and are trained
 26 on—

1 “(A) the essential functions of first re-
2 sponders and public safety organizations;

3 “(B) the working conditions unique to first
4 responders;

5 “(C) common and novel stressors inherent
6 in public safety and emergency response work;

7 “(D) normal and abnormal adaptation to
8 occupational stress and trauma; and

9 “(E) the unique aspects of confidentiality
10 and testimonial privilege; and

11 “(5) provide peer support, mental and behav-
12 ioral health and substance use disorder assistance,
13 and referral services to meet the needs of first re-
14 sponders and family members or household members
15 at risk of experiencing mental or behavioral health
16 or substance use disorders.

17 “(c) ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS.—

18 “(1) IN GENERAL.—In maintaining the hotline
19 under subsection (a), the Secretary shall—

20 “(A) consult with the National Domestic
21 Violence Hotline, the 988 Suicide and Crisis
22 Lifeline, and the Veterans Crisis Line to ensure
23 that first responders are connected in real-time
24 to the appropriate specialized hotline service,
25 when applicable;

1 “(B) conduct a public awareness campaign
2 for the hotline under subsection (a);

3 “(C) consult with Federal departments and
4 agencies, including the Substance Abuse and
5 Mental Health Services Administration and the
6 Department of Justice, to increase awareness
7 regarding the hotline under subsection (a); and

8 “(D) consult with organizations that oper-
9 ate existing crisis or peer support hotlines for
10 first responders with respect to best practices
11 for operating such hotlines.

12 “(2) EXISTING HOTLINES.—The Secretary or
13 an entity receiving a grant or contract under sub-
14 section (a), as applicable, shall form partnerships be-
15 tween the existing national first responders mental
16 health hotline and other first responder helplines
17 and websites.

18 “(3) COORDINATION.—The Secretary shall en-
19 sure that calls from public safety personnel received
20 through the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline are ap-
21 propriately referred to the hotline under subsection
22 (a).

23 “(4) TRAINING CURRICULUM.—Not later than 2
24 years after the date of enactment of the First Re-
25 sponders Wellness Act, the Secretary shall develop,

1 in coordination with mental health providers and
 2 first responder associations or personnel, trauma-in-
 3 formed and culturally competent training, guidance,
 4 and standards for 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
 5 network center personnel on the unique concerns, re-
 6 sources, linkages, and stressors of first responders.

7 “(d) ANNUAL REPORT.—The Secretary shall submit
 8 an annual report to Congress on the hotline under sub-
 9 section (a) and implementation of this section, including—

10 “(1) an evaluation of the effectiveness of activi-
 11 ties conducted or supported under subsection (a);

12 “(2) an evaluation of staffing levels necessary
 13 to maintain adequate services;

14 “(3) a directory of entities or organizations to
 15 which staff maintaining the hotline funded under
 16 this section may make referrals; and

17 “(4) such additional information as the Sec-
 18 retary determines appropriate.

19 “(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

20 “(1) CULTURALLY COMPETENT FIRST RE-
 21 SPONDER PEER SPECIALIST.—The term ‘culturally
 22 competent first responder peer specialist’ means an
 23 individual—

24 “(A) with familiarity with, and under-
 25 standing of, the duties and unique stressors of

1 first responders, which may include experience
 2 working as a first responder; and

3 “(B) who completed a trauma-informed
 4 and culturally competent training curriculum
 5 developed pursuant to subsection (c)(4), or an-
 6 other trauma-informed and culturally com-
 7 petent training curriculum, as the Secretary de-
 8 termines appropriate.

9 “(2) FIRST RESPONDER.—The term ‘first re-
 10 sponder’—

11 “(A) means—

12 “(i) a law enforcement officer, fire-
 13 fighter, or member of a rescue squad or
 14 ambulance crew (as such terms are defined
 15 in section 1204 of title I of the Omnibus
 16 Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of
 17 1968); or

18 “(ii) a public safety telecommunicator,
 19 including 9–1–1 operators and dispatchers;
 20 and

21 “(B) includes a retired first responder.

22 “(3) FIRST RESPONDER MENTAL HEALTH
 23 SERVICES PROVIDER.—The term ‘first responder
 24 mental health services provider’ includes a State-li-
 25 censed or State-certified counselor, trauma coun-

1 selor, psychologist or other State licensed or certified
2 mental health professional who—

3 “(A) is qualified under State law to pro-
4 vide mental or behavioral health services; and

5 “(B) has a familiarity with and under-
6 standing of the duties and unique stressors of
7 first responders.

8 “(f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—To
9 carry out this section, there are authorized to be appro-
10 priated \$10,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2025 through
11 2031.”.

12 **SEC. 3. CRISIS COUNSELING ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING.**

13 Section 416(a) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Re-
14 lief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5183(a))
15 is amended by inserting “and to qualified emergency re-
16 sponse providers responding to major disasters” after
17 “victims of major disasters”.

18 **SEC. 4. REPORT ON ON-SITE SERVICES DURING A NA-**
19 **TIONAL DISASTER.**

20 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after the
21 date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Health and
22 Human Services, acting through the Assistant Secretary
23 for Mental Health and Substance Use, shall issue a report
24 on best practices and recommendations to establish a new
25 mobile health care delivery site to provide integrated,

1 short-term crisis services to qualified emergency response
 2 providers of a major disaster. Such services shall—

- 3 (1) be culturally and linguistically appropriate;
- 4 (2) be trauma-informed; and
- 5 (3) incorporate disaster behavioral interven-
- 6 tions.

7 (b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

8 (1) MAJOR DISASTER.—The term “major dis-

9 aster” has the meaning given such term in section

10 102 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and

11 Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5122).

12 (2) MAJOR DISASTER AREA.—The term “major

13 disaster area” has the meaning given such term in

14 section 625.2 of title 20, Code of Federal Regula-

15 tions (or successor regulations).

16 (3) QUALIFIED EMERGENCY RESPONSE PRO-

17 VIDERS.—The term “qualified emergency response

18 providers” means—

19 (A) emergency response providers (as de-

20 fined in section 2 of the Homeland Security Act

21 of 2002 (6 U.S.C. 101)); and

22 (B) public safety telecommunications.

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