Testimony Before:

Representative Robin L. Kelly

My name is Emilee Moeke and I am a Bone Marrow Transplant Coordinator at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, IL. I received my BA in nursing from the University of Michigan and have since then achieved the following certifications: [insert certifications]. I’ve been in my current role at Rush for about 6 months – prior to that I spent 3 years serving as a registered nurse (RN) on the bone marrow transplant floor at Rush and 2 years serving in the same position at McLaren Northern Michigan Hospital in Petoskey, MI. I really appreciate the opportunity to join you today in discussing the impact that Bill H.R.2913 – Mental Health in Schools Act of 2017 would have on youth suffering from mental illness in society today. A classmate of mine in high school suffered from mental health disease and I witnessed firsthand many of the struggles he had in the education system. Unfortunately our high school did not provide adequate care and support for him, so he ultimately dropped out of school because it was too difficult of an environment for him to be in on a daily basis. Witnessing his struggle had a major impact on me and is the reason I am so invested in improving mental health care in schools.

If this legislation passes, it will increase funding for schools in order to provide access to more comprehensive school-based mental health services and provide comprehensive training for children with mental disabilities, as well as their parents, siblings, teachers, community service personnel, and other concerned members of the community (source = Bill page). I support this legislation because there is currently a severe lack of support for adolescents suffering from mental health disease, despite an increasing prevalence of the disease. A recent study showed that, “approximately one in every four to five youth in the U.S. meets criteria for a mental disorder with severe impairment across their lifetime (Merikangas et al., 2010). However, the National Institute of Mental Health reported that nearly 80% of adolescents aged 6-17 years old that suffer from mental health issues do not receive appropriate mental health care (Kataoka, Zhang, & Wells, 2002). This legislation would go a long way towards ensuring that these children start receiving the support and care they so desperately need so they can go on to live a happy and successful life.

Not only would this legislation directly impact the individuals suffering from mental health disease, it would also have a strong benefit on the community. Family members of the child suffering from mental health disease and other concerned members of the community would be able to receive comprehensive training on how to support and care for these individuals. This would help improve the child’s environment at home, which is key to their ongoing development.

If we don’t take action, then these children will continue to go untreated and will struggle mightily with their education. Studies have shown that students who suffer from mental health disease are more likely to have chronic absences, low achievement, disruptive behavior, and drop out of school completely (source: NPR article). If these students don’t receive the support and care they need, their mental illness will just continue to affect their lives, both inside and outside of the classroom. People suffering from mental illness can exhibit depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders, and addictive behaviors (source: Mayo Clinic). Individuals living with serious mental illness are typically more difficult to engage in ongoing treatment and at a higher risk of ignoring treatment altogether (source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4780300/>). Thus, it is extremely important that these individuals receive special support and care at an early age, in order to promote their long-term wellbeing.

As a registered nurse, the key objective of my position is to be an advocate for my patients. Though I don’t work directly with individuals suffering from mental health disease, I do come into contact with a lot of individuals who have been letting their various illnesses or diseases go untreated for years. Many of these individuals are just uninformed about their own illness and the types of support they can receive to help treat it. As a patient advocate, it’s my responsibility to make sure patients are fully informed of all their healthcare options and what they can do to best manage their illness.

I recognize there is a significant cost involved in this with bill. A grant for each school to be served can be up to $2,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2018 through 2022, or a total of $10,000,000 (Napolitano, 2017). While this is a significant use of taxpayer dollars, the benefits as I outlined earlier are immense. No child should go without the care and support they need in managing their mental health illness. This investment will pay off in the long run, as it will help these individuals learn to manage their illness at an early age, which will help them live a better life and help decrease their future medical expenses.

In closing, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or further conversations on this topic. As I hope I have expressed through this testimony, I am very well informed on the issue of mental health in our youth and am more than willing to be a point of contact or expert on this issue. By passing this legislation we can make a difference in the lives of thousands of children that suffer from mental health disease and aren’t getting the support they need. Not only will this provide immediately benefits, but it will help them learn how to manage their illness and live a happy and successful life. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today.

References:

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