

Womack, Trone Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Help Address Mental Health Crisis Exacerbated by COVID-19 Pandemic

Contact: Alexia Sikora (Alexia.Sikora@mail.house.gov)

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Washington, DC - January 21, 2021....U.S. Representatives Steve Womack (R-AR) and David Trone (D-MD) today introduced the Preventing Mental Health and Substance Use Crises During Emergencies Act to help address the worsening mental health crisis exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. The bipartisan legislation will establish a joint task force charged with providing recommendations to better serve those in need and support the creation of a coordinated national strategy for the future.

Congressman Womack said, "The coronavirus outbreak is a multifaceted crisis. The devastating medical and economic consequences--compounded by stress and isolation--have profoundly impacted the mental health and well-being of Americans. We must bring this silent epidemic out of the shadows and help those struggling. This legislation implements a coordinated effort to ensure we are better prepared to assist individuals and provide life-saving resources now and in the future."

Congressman Trone said, "This pandemic is unlike anything any of us have seen in our lifetimes, and to say these are difficult times would be an understatement. People need help and they need help now - and this pandemic has shown us that our country lacks the resources to adequately respond to this mental health emergency. This bill will help us learn from our mistakes and better prepare for mental health crises down the road."

Provisions of the Preventing Mental Health and Substance Use Crises During Emergencies Act include:

- *Directing the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to convene a task force charged with assessing the federal government's response to the impacts of COVID-19;
- *Creating a national strategy to prevent future mental health and substance abuse crises during public health emergencies; and
- *Periodically reconvening the task force to keep the national strategy up to date with current technologies and best practices.

This bill comes as millions of Americans have experienced a decline in mental health since the start of the pandemic. Earlier this year, calls to the Disaster Distress Hotline were up nearly 900%. Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 40% of American adults reported struggles with mental health or substance use issues in June alone.