



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

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CONTACT
[CJ Young](#) — (202) 225-5735

Pallone's Opening Remarks at Public Health Legislative Hearing

"A strong public health response is one of the first lines of defense when our nation is faced with a health crisis."

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) offered the following opening remarks at a Health Subcommittee legislative hearing titled, "Examining Initiatives to Advance Public Health."*

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I believe that we can all agree on the importance of supporting our country's public health system. A strong public health response is one of the first lines of defense when our nation is faced with a health crisis. It is also an important tool when addressing longstanding healthcare issues, including the prevention of harmful and costly chronic conditions. Today we will hear from our witnesses on four public health bills:

H.R. 767, the SOAR to Health and Wellness Act, establishes a pilot program to train health care providers to identify and care for potential human trafficking victims. A doctor's visit or emergency department trip is a critical point of intervention for victims, as it may be a rare moment in which they can detach from traffickers. Teaching providers to recognize the signs of trafficking and providing them with the resources to assist victims can truly be the difference between life and death. Thank you to Congressman Cardenas for his work on this bill.

H.R. 931, the Firefighter Cancer Registry Act of 2017, introduced by Congressmen Collins and Pascrell, is another bill we will discuss that creates a voluntary cancer registry of firefighters to collect data related to their cancer risks and outcomes. Firefighters may be exposed to carcinogens and other hazardous chemicals that impact their health while they are on the job. The registry would help CDC collect and monitor information from firefighters over time to inform the best prevention and intervention practices.

H.R. 1876, the Good Samaritan Health Professionals Act, would limit the civil liability of the volunteer health professionals that provide their services during disaster response. Our volunteer health professionals are a crucial resource in major disasters. I remember 9-11 and the bravery of medical volunteers from all over the nation, especially from my home

state of New Jersey, as they headed across the water to help the victims in New York City. I also think of the response to Hurricane Sandy and how many people survived the storm due to the action of medical volunteers. While I am always concerned about preempting strong state laws, I look forward to learning more about this bill and understanding what we can do as lawmakers to support medical volunteers at the federal level.

And finally, I would like to thank Congresswoman Robin Kelly, who is here today, for her work on H.R. 767, the Action for Dental Health Act of 2017. This bill would reauthorize the CDC oral health promotion and disease prevention grants, and would allow volunteer dental programs and other eligible entities to apply for these CDC grants.

Oral health is often thought of as separate from a person's medical care, but the truth is that oral health is vital to overall health. Ensuring access to affordable dental care would lower the number of emergency department visits for preventable oral conditions, and reduce the risk of chronic disease. In short, it would lead to an improved quality of life.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today to talk about these bills and their impact on our healthcare system. I look forward to our discussion.

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