

Finance Health Care Subcommittee Hearing The COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: Improving Mental Health and Addiction Services in Our Communities

Opening Statement

- Thank you, Madam Chairwoman – I'm glad to be with you hosting our first subcommittee hearing of the year.
- It's also great to have a fellow Montanan join us today—we'll get into a more formal introduction in a bit, but welcome, Lenette, I'm glad you could be here.
- May is Mental Health Awareness Month – an issue at the top of my mind and many others following a year of isolation for Montanans and Americans across the country.
- Last year due to COVID restrictions, Montanans and Americans were forced to stay home—we saw family-owned and small businesses shutter, workers struggle, family members isolated from their loved ones, and schools close, directly impacting our nation's youngest & brightest.
- Through no fault of their own, hardworking Montanans and Americans across the country lost their jobs—leaving them wondering how they were going to keep a roof over their families' heads and food on the table.
- Instead of socializing and learning with their friends in classrooms, students were stuck behind computer screens.
- Symptoms of anxiety and depression are on the rise.

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- In fact, in one survey, more than half of adults reported that worry or stress related to the pandemic was having a negative effect on their mental health.
- As we all know, mental health issues were a problem before the pandemic.
- In fact, it's estimated that nearly one in five American adults had some form of mental illness but fewer than half of those adults received treatment in 2019.
- Since the pandemic, lockdowns, economic hardships, and social isolation have only helped intensify what we already know – we need mental health services in our communities, and we need to make it a priority.
- The pandemic has also helped expose and magnify the flaws in our mental health system.
- In 2020, suicide was the tenth leading cause of death, and drug overdose deaths hit a record high.
- In Montana, we are unfortunately not immune to these devastating statistics.
 - We are fourth in the nation for suicides.
 - First in the nation per capita for children placed in foster care – most often due to a parent's drug or alcohol use.
 - And we are witnessing a disturbing increase in meth-related violent crime.

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- It is clear that more needs to be done to support individuals and families struggling with addiction or mental illness.
- We are fortunate in Montana to be home to treatment facilities like Rimrock, which I've had the privilege of visiting several times over the years.
- I even had the opportunity to bring Vice President Pence to show him firsthand the great work the organization does for Montanans struggling with addiction and mental health issues.
- One visit I will never forget... I had the chance to meet with a few moms who were receiving substance use treatment.
- I had just become a grandfather. I was overwhelmed with emotion.
- There I saw devotion... struggle... commitment... and so much love that the Montana moms had for their children.
- Because at Rimrock, thanks to a bill I led in the Senate, which was signed into law by President Trump, moms who are working to get back on their feet are able to *stay* with their children.
- Let me tell you... this means the world to these moms.
- Treatment centers like Rimrock make a world of difference in our communities, and they are more important now than ever as we come out of this pandemic.

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- After a year of lockdowns and closures, we are finally seeing a light at the end of the tunnel.
- Thanks to the leadership of our new Governor, Greg Gianforte, life in Montana is on its way to being back to normal.
- We've vaccinated over 350,000 Montanans and have led the nation in vaccine administration.
- Montana is now open for business. We are open for school. We are incentivizing getting back to work versus staying home – something I believe is also important for mental health because I believe there is dignity in working.
- But the reality is that there will likely be long-lasting impacts of the pandemic, particularly on mental health.
- We must aim to meet the challenges of today and prepare for the increased need that this pandemic has created.
- I am committed to working with my colleague Senator Stabenow toward that goal.
- Again, I appreciate our witnesses being here today and offering their advice and expertise on such an important topic.
- Thank you Madam Chairwoman.