

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 7, 2013

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Vice President of the United States
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
1650 Pennsylvania, Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20501

Dear Vice President Biden:

I am writing to express my full support for the strong statements made by President Obama in the aftermath of the tragic Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings in Newtown, Connecticut.

Regarding one aspect of this important issue, I urge the interagency task force that you are now leading to include the Mental Health First Aid Act (HR 5996) in its recommendations to the U.S. Congress.

Those of us in Tucson understand what the people of Newtown are going through as they continue to heal and search for answers. While there is no single legislative answer that could address the many problems that came together to cause a horrifying tragedy such as that on January 8, 2011 in Tucson or on December 14, 2012 in Newtown, we know that untreated serious mental illness was an underlying cause in these violent incidents and others across our county. That is why mental health care must be part of any effort to prevent such tragedies in the future.

Upon entering Congress, I co-sponsored the Mental Health First Aid Act and I plan to re-introduce a broader of version of the legislation early in this session. Similar to first-aid trainings run by local chapters of the American Red Cross, this important measure will take a public health approach to mental disorders in two ways. First, it would provide training to teachers, students, firefighters, police officers, emergency services workers and others on recognizing the signs and symptoms of common mental health disorders. Second, it gives these same people the tools necessary to deal with psychiatric crises and how to secure services from mental health care providers including local community mental health centers.

The President recently said that we must come together and take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies like those in Newtown. No doubt, your interagency task force will consider many proposals. As you do this, I urge you to endorse common-sense, bipartisan proposals like the Mental Health First Aid Act. We have failed to give the mental health care needs of Americans due attention for too long – and we have paid too high a price for this neglect.

Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,



Ron Barber
Member of Congress