Mental Health Awareness and Improvement Act (S. 689)  
Reauthorizing and Expanding Critical Behavioral Health Programs

The bipartisan Mental Health Awareness and Improvement Act of 2013 (S. 689) would reauthorize and improve federal education and healthcare programs related to awareness, prevention, and early identification of mental illnesses. This legislation makes targeted improvements designed to advance federal efforts to help states and local communities address their citizens’ mental health needs.

- Authorize grants for public education programs modeled after Mental Health First Aid to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of mental illnesses and addictions, while teaching effective strategies for reaching out to individuals in need and connecting them with services.
- Reauthorize the Garrett Lee Smith (GLS) Memorial Act, which helps states, tribes, colleges, and universities develop suicide prevention and intervention programs. These programs are often the first line of defense for individuals battling mental illnesses.
- Reauthorize the National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative (NCTSI), which improves access to services for children and families who have experienced trauma, a major contributing factor to mental illnesses and addictions.
- Encourage states to develop school-wide prevention programs such as positive behavioral interventions and support (PBIS) to promote positive behaviors in students, create positive conditions for learning in schools, and link students with appropriate services.
- Require the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to report on behavioral health integration and utilization of mental health services among children.
- Direct the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to improve education and awareness of treatments for opioid use disorders.
- Encourage information dissemination on evidence-based practices for mental illnesses and addictions in older adults.

S. 689 was approved unanimously by the HELP committee under the leadership of Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN). One week later, the Senate voted in favor of the legislation 95-2 as an amendment to a gun violence bill. With the underlying bill now tabled, S. 689 is in legislative limbo.

Why do we need S. 689? The programs included in S. 689 provide a foundation for improving early identification of behavioral health conditions and timely access to treatment in the U.S. The education-related provisions focus on promoting positive behavioral health development and encouraging school-based mental health partnerships. The health-related provisions focus on suicide prevention, helping children recover from traumatic events, raising Americans’ awareness of behavioral health issues, and assessing barriers to integrating behavioral health and primary care. The National Council and the Hill Day partners urge Congress to resume action on this important legislation and work quickly toward its passage.
Mental Health Awareness and Improvement Act of 2013
Co-sponsors (23)

AK: Mark Begich (D)                      MS: Roger Wicker (R)
AK: Lisa Murkowski (R)                      NC: Kay Hagan (D)
CO: Michael Bennet (D)                       NH: Kelly Ayotte (R)
CT: Richard Blumenthal (D)                   NM: Tom Udall (D)
CT: Christopher S. Murphy (D)                NY: Kirsten Gillibrand (D)
GA: Johnny Isakson (R)                       NY: Charles Schumer (D)
IA: Tom Harkin (D) (Lead Sponsor)          PA: Robert P. Casey, Jr. (D)
IL: Mark Steven Kirk (R)                    SD: Tim Johnson (D)
KS: Pat Roberts (R)                           TN: Lamar Alexander (R)
MN: Al Franken (D)                              WI: Tammy Baldwin (D)
MN: Amy Klobuchar (D)                           WY: Michael Enzi (R)
MO: Roy Blunt (R)