

Patients and Public in Danger as Suicide and Homicide Prevention Bill stalls in Senate. Press Conference Wednesday

For Immediate Release

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SB 110 (Flores-R) would prevent suicides and homicides by allowing nurse practitioners and physician assistants to sign emergency paperwork for patients to get care. Its companion bill HB 9 (Campbell-D) sailed through the House quickly and passed unanimously on the house floor by the second week of legislative session. But the senate version sits in the Children, Families and Elder Affairs Committee where it is in danger of dying. It has been there since the beginning of the year.

Nurse Practitioners (NPs) approached Representative Campbell and Senator Flores because they could not get patients the care they needed. These NPs have actually had some patients who tragically committed suicide because the nurse practitioners could not sign a Baker Act certification. If they could have signed the paperwork, the patients would have received emergency psychiatric treatment and evaluation. Instead a tragedy ensued.

"I just think that the senate does not fully understand how serious a problem this is" stated Stan Whittaker ARNP, Chairman of the Florida Association of Nurse Practitioners. "I had a patient commit suicide because I could not sign the paperwork, and I am not alone."

Whittaker recalled how he was working in a rural clinic and had to call the police to evaluate the patient and sign the Baker Act certificate. But the patient got scared and told the officer a different story. The officer had no choice but to let the patient go. The patient was dead two hours later.

"Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Floridians who are 25-35 years old and the third leading cause of death for ages 15-24" Whittaker added. "It is a preventable tragedy and we hope the senate will not force another family to suffer because of an outdated law."

Representative Campbell who is registered nurse is also concerned about the rise in mass shootings due to mentally ill homicidal patients. "We don't need another Newtown or Aurora here in Florida" Campbell insisted. "I sincerely hope the Florida Senate will quickly agenda this bill so we can get mentally ill people the emergency care they need to protect them and the public from further tragedies" she said.

Presently social workers, mental health therapists, marriage and family therapists, psychiatric nurses, police officers, psychologists and psychiatrists may sign this paperwork. But the law was written before the nurse practitioner and physician assistant professions even existed

Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants are educated, trained and legally required to asses for suicidal and homicidal intent in their patients. They are also required to get their patients emergency care if needed. But under current laws, they must get another professional to sign the paperwork; in many cases that person is law enforcement.

"It is unclear why such a good bill would not be quickly placed on the committee's agenda" stated Representative Campbell "I think that the senate just does not understand that people have died because these professionals are not authorized to sign the emergency paper work. I hope they will stop more tragedies from happening."

A press conference addressing this issue will be held at the Capitol Wednesday at 9 AM on the fourth floor Rotunda by the Senate Gallery.

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