



Students for Patient Advocacy Nationwide

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The Honorable Todd M. Lakey, Chair
Senate Judiciary and Rules Committee, Idaho State Senate
April 2, 2026

Re: Idaho House Bill 491 (Erickson) – Support if Amended

Dear Chairman Lakey and members of the Senate Judiciary and Rules Committee,

Students for Patient Advocacy Nationwide (SPAN) appreciates the intent of Idaho House Bill 491, which aims to expand existing Good Samaritan protections to explicitly include mental health and suicidal crises, providing civil liability immunity to individuals who voluntarily offer emergency psychological assistance in good faith and without compensation. As an organization committed to advancing equitable, evidence-based patient advocacy with a focus on youth and community mental health, we recognize the critical importance of legislation that lowers barriers to crisis intervention and supports a culture of care.

While we acknowledge and commend the efforts behind H.B. 491, we write today to respectfully **request a specific amendment** that would strengthen the bill's impact and ensure it fully serves the communities it intends to support.

We are particularly concerned about the following aspect of the bill in its current form:

- **Lack of Training Guidance or Safe Harbor for Trained Responders:** The bill extends immunity broadly to any good-faith responder but does not distinguish or provide additional protections for individuals who have completed evidence-based mental health crisis training programs (such as Mental Health First Aid or QPR). Without this distinction, individuals who have invested in preparation may face the same ambiguity as untrained bystanders, potentially discouraging enrollment in training programs and undermining efforts to improve community-level crisis response quality.

To address this concern, we propose the following amendment:

- **Amendment Proposal – Recognition of Trained Lay Responders:** Add language explicitly affirming that individuals who have completed a recognized mental health first aid or crisis intervention training program (e.g., Mental Health First Aid, QPR, or an equivalent program approved by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare) are presumed to have acted in good faith when following their training protocols. This provision would not restrict immunity for untrained bystanders but would create an affirmative presumption that further protects and incentivizes trained community responders.

The urgency of this legislation is underscored by the state's crisis data. According to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Idaho ranked 4th highest in the nation for suicide rate in 2023, with approximately 23.3 deaths per 100,000 residents. Research also shows that bystanders are significantly less likely to intervene in situations involving mental health crises compared to physical emergencies (Harris et al., 2025, *Journal of Experimental Criminology*), making legal clarity and public confidence in immunity protections essential to closing this intervention gap.



We believe the proposed amendment will help ensure H.B. 491 more effectively promotes informed, confident bystander engagement in mental health crises, ultimately saving lives. As students and young advocates working across the country to advance evidence-based, equitable policy, we are eager to see H.B. 491 succeed in a way that aligns with both expert consensus and community needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rahini", with a stylized flourish at the end.

[Rahini Nedunuri]

[rahini.nedunuri@spanationwide.org]

Students for Patient Advocacy Nationwide (SPAN)



References

Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. (2025). About suicide prevention.
<https://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/services-programs/behavioral-health/about-suicide-prevention>

USAFacts. (2026). How many people die by suicide in Idaho each year?
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Harris, M. N., Konkel, R. H., Hoffman, C. Y., & Daigle, L. E. (2025). Intervention in crisis: Understanding the role of mental illness in bystander decision-making using audio vignettes. *Crime & Delinquency*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00938548251359591>

Idaho State Legislature. (2026). House Bill 491 – Emergency mental health first aid.
<https://legislature.idaho.gov>

