



Customs and Border Protection Behavioral Health Act

Background:

Current weak border security policies and failure to enforce U.S. immigration laws have encouraged millions of migrants to enter the U.S. illegally. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of pounds of narcotics have been smuggled into our communities, causing one of the worst opioid epidemics our country has ever witnessed.

Every day, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel endure the consequences of the Administration's poor policy decisions, which has taken a mental and physical toll on those who defend our nation's borders. CBP personnel are often outnumbered and left with little to no support by an administration that remains willfully ignorant of a crisis that they are only exacerbating. Every day, frontline agents and officers witness human tragedy in the course of their duties, often coming across deceased migrants, abandoned children, and cartel-trafficked individuals. They are the first responders for individuals in distress and are often the first law enforcement officers that victims of transnational crimes report their abuse to. CBP personnel ceaselessly fight to keep our nation safe in extreme working conditions.

Challenges:

These historic levels of migration, coupled with the horrendous working conditions, has tragically caused morale among agents and officers to plummet, as well as attrition rates to spike. Perhaps more alarming, this year, we have witnessed the highest number of suicides among our frontline personnel in over a decade. We must do more to support those who protect and defend our nation's borders. One agent or officer lost is one too many.

Currently, there is little behavioral health support given to frontline CBP personnel who are bearing the brunt of the Biden Administration's crisis along the Southwest border. This legislative proposal would provide much-needed support for the men and women who work to keep our nation safe and borders secure, by expanding their access to behavioral health resources.

Summary:

The CBP Behavioral Health Act would:

- Require CBP to hire behavioral health providers and create a comprehensive behavioral health program that enables CBP personnel to seek the resources they need in order to continue to protect our country.
- Establish a Behavioral Health Readiness Office within CBP at all initial entry training sites. Training shall include basic behavioral health awareness to enhance awareness and overcome the stigma of mental health.
- Create an expectation that the CBP Commissioner make every effort to provide alternative employment opportunities similar in location and pay to CBP personnel who are determined to be permanently unable to fulfill assigned duties due to behavioral health concerns. Additionally, require the CBP Commissioner to consult with labor organizations who represent CBP personnel, to establish an appeals process for individuals who are under this determination.
- Create robust privacy policies so that healthcare providers may not notify the CBP Commissioner of personnel who are obtaining behavioral healthcare, unless there is a serious risk of harm to self, others, or the mission, an acute medical condition that impairs the individual's ability to perform duties, or another special circumstance at issue.
- Authorize appropriations of \$23,100,000 from FY2023 to FY2028 to provide these mental health resources to CBP personnel.

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