

Speaker: Anamul Haque  
Public Hearing on Suicide and Suicide Prevention  
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### **Abstract**

The silent epidemic of suicides and mental health disorders in young people needs to be addressed right now before more lives and families are ruined. Bills A5313/S5704 and A5315/S2886 will provide educators with the resources and skills to handle mental health problems for our students before it develops into a crisis.

### **Oral Testimony**

Thank you, Senators Carlucci and Rivera, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this topic which affects me every day since August 22nd 2016.

On that day, the worst scene any brother could imagine happened. On that day, my brother died by suicide using a shotgun. I had a glimmer of hope he might have survived. However, all hope was erased as I went to the room and saw the large pool of blood. Seeing parts of his brain matter on the wall next to him lying down with the weapon was a scene I can never forget and I recollect every day. He was only nineteen. What a terrible way to end a life which had great potential.

Months after the incident, I fell into a deep depression and stop going to school. It was the end of the line for me and I had daily suicide ideations. I had a crisis in identity since no one in the Bangladeshi or Muslim community can relate to the daily turmoil I am going through. I summoned up the energy to back to school and start to rebuild my life again. As times goes by, I fear the memories of my brother will be forgotten.

Death should not be the sole determinant factor in the termination of person's life. My brother had many dreams, one of which since he was a little, was to change the world by leaving it better off than before. I am continuing his legacy by my efforts in raising awareness, going to rallies, talking to elected officials, and joining mental health advocacy groups. However, I feel more can be done.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for teenagers and young adults. The media only talks about this topic when it's a celebrity, multi-millionaire, or school shooter. These people do not represent the vast majority of victims. Suicide should not be seen as something a person commits. No one wants to die when they are young, they want the pain to stop. All it may take is a teacher, police officer, or the kindness of a stranger to help a struggling young person.

The stigma surrounds this topic has prevented major mental health legislation from passing both at the state and national level. People like me do not fill the mold of a suicide survivor, if it can happen to me, it can also strike at your family. I am done with the crying and sadness, I want change.

This past winter, I was looking up mental health bills which may help young people struggling with mental health disorders. The bills, A5313 and A5315 sparked my interest, they are both sponsored by Assemblyman Crespo. A5313 tries to develop a curriculum for teachers to look for the warning signs of suicide and other mental health disorders. This does NOT imply they are psychologists but make them become better professionals and get the students the help they need. A5315 relates to colleges within the state to incorporate a mental health curriculum for those students seeking to become professional teachers.

Both of these legislations are in the Senate, due to my work in talking to elected officials. However, these bills have been stuck in the education committee for years. The main objection is from the teacher's union, who don't want teachers to be perceived as school psychologists. These two bills do not imply this misinformation, instead they aim to make better teachers and foster an improved learning environment. After seeing the death of my brother, I am not scared of the opinions of a few union leaders. I will keep fighting and doing what is right, whether you like it or not. I am not asking for much, I just want to improve this country which has given me so many opportunities.

I never be silent or give up this fight. We suicide sufferers are tired of living in the shadows, we are more resilient and stronger than you realize. Ultimately, the power belongs to the people, and they overwhelming support these bills. If the union tries to block these bills, this will negatively affect the public image of being a teacher or union member; when the state has a teacher shortage, there are bigger priorities to win then to silence these two bills.

Thanks again to Senators Carlucci and Rivera for hearing my story and my call for action before this year's session ends.