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1. Opening

Greetings, Chairmen Carlucci and Rivera. Thank you to the Committee on Health and the Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities for inviting The Trevor Project to testify in this important hearing on suicide prevention.

2. Introduction

The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people. We work to save young lives by providing support through free and confidential suicide prevention and crisis intervention programs: our 24/7 phone lifeline, chat, text and upcoming integrations with social media platforms. We also run TrevorSpace, the world's largest safe space social networking site for LGBTQ youth, and operate innovative education, research, and advocacy programs.

My name is Sam Dorison, and I am privileged to serve as Chief of Staff for The Trevor Project, overseeing organization-wide strategy and high priority initiatives. I have been in this role for almost two years, and also have a personal connection to Trevor's work. I previously volunteered as a Trevor crisis counselor for over three years, directly serving just a small share of the thousands of youth that we support.

3. Innovation at The Trevor Project

A vital priority at The Trevor Project is bringing innovation into our work, so that we can serve even more youth at an even higher level of quality. I'd like to highlight today a few of our innovative partnerships.

First, Trevor partnered with AT&T to expand our chat and text services to 24/7, just like our Lifeline and peer support services on TrevorSpace. This expansion aligns with Trevor's national survey of over 24,000 youth, with over 70% saying they are somewhat or very likely to reach out via chat or text when they need help. AT&T's commitment of \$1 million in addition to in-kind services powered this expansion.

Second, The Trevor Project recently announced a partnership with Google.org. As part of Google's AI Impact Challenge, Trevor is one of twenty global nonprofits to receive financial resources and subject-matter expertise. Google's commitment of \$1.5 million is catalyzing our efforts to bring artificial intelligence into our work, allowing our trained crisis counselors to better serve even more youth in crisis.

Through it all, my conviction is that LGBTQ youth, and all vulnerable communities, should be supported using the leading technologies that are available in any industry, anywhere on the planet. And we can do so in ways that are efficient, ethical, and enable continuous improvements in the quality of care we provide to youth in New York State and beyond.

4. The Trevor Project in New York

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth ages 10 to 24—and LGBTQ youth are at a significantly higher risk. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide as their straight peers. In addition, nearly half of young transgender people have made a suicide attempt, many before age 25. This issue is pressing in New York State. The Office of Mental Health's (OMH) report *1,700 Too Many* reveals that the number of suicides in New York has increased by 32% over the past decade, making it the fifth-highest state for suicide deaths.

Over the past year, Trevor's phone, chat, and text services reached over 4,500 crisis contacts in New York State, but we estimate that almost 100,000 LGBTQ young people in the state are in crisis every year. OMH's suicide prevention plan has identified support entities like Trevor's crisis services as cost-saving programs that actually work. Independent review of Trevor's crisis services programs show that over 90% of suicidal youth are successfully de-escalated and sustain de-escalation for several weeks after intervention.

Youth spend more than one-third of their time in schools, surrounded by faculty and staff. Because these professionals have unique opportunities to recognize signals of suicidal ideation, it is critically important that schools equip their faculty and staff with the knowledge, tools, and training they need to prevent suicide. This is consistent with OMH's call for development of "competent, caring communities" covering an individual's lifespan.

With this context in mind, The Trevor Project's advocacy team undertook an evaluation of school suicide prevention policies across New York, and considered to what extent those policies explicitly address the unique needs of groups shown to be at higher risk of suicide attempts, including LGBTQ youth. This research is still ongoing, but only 243 school districts of the 725

total districts contacted have a verified policy. Based on comparable work we have done across the country, we expect our final report to show that under 50% have a verified policy, with under 10% mentioning LGBTQ youth in any capacity.

5. Opportunity for New York to lead

New York State has the opportunity to be a leader in a field where leadership means saving lives.

The Trevor Project would be thrilled to work with Senators on legislation that supports the great teachers and school staff of New York with comprehensive school suicide prevention policies crafted to make the necessary work to prevent suicide easy to understand and apply. We have coordinated with organizations across New York to draft model guidance based on New York's specific needs, and have met with the New York State Education Department which is very supportive of the efforts.

Earlier this year, we also requested that the Senate include in the state budget \$500,000 in direct funding for The Trevor Project for volunteer recruitment, training, and oversight. This would allow us to more than double the number of young LGBTQ New Yorkers we serve from 4,500 to over 10,000. Amidst a \$125 million budget decrease—including a \$40 million DOH budget decrease—we did not receive this funding. It is our hope that next year the State Senate will prioritize supporting our life-affirming and life-saving services, marking 2020 as an inflection point in New York's suicide prevention work.

6. Thank you and conclusion

We know that today's youth are tomorrow's adult citizens and leaders. Chairmen and members of the committees, thank you again for prioritizing this issue and for inviting The Trevor Project to join you today as we, together, shape that future.