

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE RESOLUTION

No. 204 Session of
2007

INTRODUCED BY ORIE, BOSCOLA, WASHINGTON, COSTA, ERICKSON,
RAFFERTY, RHOADES, C. WILLIAMS, BROWNE, WOZNIAK AND STACK,
NOVEMBER 2, 2007

REFERRED TO AGING AND YOUTH, NOVEMBER 2, 2007

A CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

1 Directing the Joint State Government Commission to establish a
2 task force to enlist the help of knowledgeable persons to
3 develop educational materials to identify elderly persons at
4 risk for suicide and to identify barriers and ways to
5 surmount barriers encountered by professionals and
6 nonprofessionals in connecting at-risk persons with
7 appropriate resources.

8 WHEREAS, Senior citizens, especially senior males, who
9 experience mood disorders, social isolation, divorce, widowhood
10 and physical illness are at risk for suicide; and

11 WHEREAS, In 2002 seniors comprised 12.3% of the population
12 but accounted for 17.5% of all completed suicides; and

13 WHEREAS, Seniors succeed at suicide in one of every four
14 attempts; and

15 WHEREAS, Every 95 minutes an elderly person succumbs to
16 suicide; and

17 WHEREAS, An estimated 77% of seniors who commit suicide have
18 had contact with their primary care physicians within a year of
19 their suicide; and

20 WHEREAS, An estimated 58% of seniors who commit suicide have

1 had contact with their primary care physicians within one month
2 of their suicide; and

3 WHEREAS, Seniors frequently have contact with health
4 professionals such as medical and osteopathic physicians,
5 physician assistants, optometrists, dentists and dental
6 hygienists, nurses and nurse practitioners, podiatrists,
7 physical therapists, pharmacists, chiropractors, social workers,
8 speech and occupational therapists and audiologists; and

9 WHEREAS, Very few health care professionals with specialized
10 education in geriatric mental health practice in this
11 Commonwealth; and

12 WHEREAS, Senior citizens frequently have or have had contact
13 with their peers in churches and in senior centers or contact
14 with meals-on-wheels volunteers, home care and other direct care
15 workers, senior citizen advocacy groups and with area agencies
16 on aging; and

17 WHEREAS, As they perform their daily functions, utility
18 workers and postal service workers may see signs of mental
19 distress in their senior customers; and

20 WHEREAS, In the course of performing their law enforcement
21 functions, police personnel may detect signs of mental distress
22 in elderly persons they encounter; and

23 WHEREAS, Many signs of suicide may seem like common-sense
24 signs of mental distress; and

25 WHEREAS, Few people are equipped to read these signs in a
26 manner which would indicate that the elderly person is at
27 imminent risk for attempting suicide; therefore be it

28 RESOLVED (the House of Representatives concurring), That the
29 General Assembly direct the Joint State Government Commission to
30 establish a task force of four members of the Senate and four

1 members of the House of Representatives to undertake a study to
2 develop educational materials for health care professionals,
3 seniors' peers, providers of services to the elderly, senior
4 advocacy groups, home care and direct care workers and utility,
5 postal services and police personnel to identify seniors at risk
6 for suicide; and be it further

7 RESOLVED, That the President pro tempore of the Senate, the
8 Minority Leader of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of
9 Representatives and the Minority Leader of the House of
10 Representatives each appoint two members to the task force; and
11 be it further

12 RESOLVED, That the task force be authorized to create an
13 advisory committee to assist the task force, to include
14 representatives of the following groups:

- 15 (1) Health care professionals.
- 16 (2) Mental health advocacy groups.
- 17 (3) Counties which have implemented gatekeeper programs.
- 18 (4) Senior advocacy groups.
- 19 (5) Senior peer support groups.
- 20 (6) Meals-on-wheels volunteers.
- 21 (7) Senior center personnel.
- 22 (8) Area agencies on aging personnel.
- 23 (9) Utility postal service and police personnel;

24 and be it further

25 RESOLVED, That the task force develop educational materials
26 for professionals and nonprofessionals to identify seniors at
27 risk for suicide; and be it further

28 RESOLVED, That the task force identify barriers and ways to
29 surmount barriers encountered by professionals and
30 nonprofessionals in connecting at-risk persons with appropriate

1 resources, including funding barriers; and be it further
2 RESOLVED, That the task force report findings and
3 recommendations to the General Assembly no later than one year
4 following the adoption of this resolution.