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CBC Taskforce Report: Black Youth Suicide Rates Rising, Defying Historic Trends

***Bill Introduced Alongside Report; NYU McSilver Executive Director
Dr. Michael A. Lindsey Leads Taskforce's Working Group of Experts***

Washington, DC (December 17, 2019) — Following months of listening events and meetings in Washington, DC and across multiple Congressional districts, The Congressional Black Caucus's Emergency Taskforce on Black Youth Suicide and Mental Health today released a report, "[Ring the Alarm: the Crisis of Black Youth Suicide in America](#)," outlining the state of Black youth mental health and detailed policy recommendations for consideration by Congress. Chaired by **Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman**, the task force was formed in April to explore the causes of and solutions to increasing rates of suicide among Black children. The report was assembled with the help of the task force's working group, led by **Dr. Michael Lindsey, PhD, MSW, MPH**, Executive Director of the [NYU McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research](#).

"Alarming trends among Black youth have been overlooked as America grapples with rising suicide rates," said Dr. Lindsey. "The historical suicide rate gap between Black and White youth is narrowing by some measures; and among the youngest, Black children actually have the highest rates of suicide. With this report, we are ringing the alarm on a growing mental health crisis among Black youth and calling attention to the need for more research funding; mental health professionals in schools; and local, state and federal attention."

"When I pushed for the creation of this Emergency Taskforce this past April, I conceived of its mission as an emergency response to what I viewed as an emerging crisis," said Watson Coleman. "What the data shows us about the increases in suicide and mental health issues requires a focused and deliberate assessment of what's at play so that we can offer real solutions. I'm proud that our taskforce and working group have produced a roadmap for Congress to follow in order to save lives in the immediate term and turn this crisis around."

"We cannot overstate the significance of the work of this taskforce," said **Rep. Karen Bass, Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus**. "For far too long, a stigma against mental health assistance has plagued the Black community. We must sound the alarm on the crisis of suicide rates among our youth and come together to build healthy communities. The taskforce's recommendations provide a clear roadmap towards that end."

"Shame, socioeconomic status, lack of trust and lack of access all remain barriers in mental health, leading so many African-Americans to suffer in silence," said **Congresswoman Ilhan Omar**. "The rate of suicides for Black children is more than double that of White children, according to data released last year. Despite these trends, Black Americans are less likely to receive behavioral treatment – regardless of age or income. There are many different factors for why African Americans with mental health issues are not receiving the care they need. Institutionalized racism in America has greatly influenced socioeconomic disparities faced by communities of color, and poverty is a high-risk factor in behavioral health issues. This summer, I was grateful to host Members of the Congressional Black Caucus, and mental health experts in my district to tackle this epidemic. And today, I am proud

to work with Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman to call attention to it and find solutions that help our communities.”

“For almost 3 decades, more and more Black children and teens have attempted suicide,” said **Rep. Barbara Lee**. “The rate of Black girls attempting suicide is out pacing their peers and Black boys are attempting suicide often with more lethal means. We owe it to our young people to take them seriously and find unique, culturally responsive solutions to address this crisis.”

The working group, comprised of mental health professionals, social workers, educators, academics and advocacy leaders, examined research from the academic community and testimony from advocates, doctors, members of the clergy, and students in compiling this report. In addition to presenting a range of findings on the state of Black youth mental health, the report offers evidence-based strategies to get resources and mental health assistance to Black youth and includes specific resources available to families right now.

Alongside the report, Congresswoman Watson Coleman announced the pending introduction of a comprehensive legislative package aimed at addressing youth mental health — in communities of color and well beyond. **The Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2019** will:

- Include new and existing legislative proposals to increase the amount of research relating to Black youth mental health and suicide through the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute of Mental Health, particularly research undertaken by minority researchers;
- Promote training to students, parents, teachers, and other school staff to identify and screen for signs of trauma, mental health disorders, and risk of suicide;
- Increase funding for and directing the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) to study mental health disparities in racial and ethnic minority groups;
- Prohibit federal funds from being used for conversion therapy and prohibits SAMHSA grants to states that continue to allow such practices.

Read the [full report](#), the [executive summary](#) and the [resources](#) section. More about NYU McSilver’s work on the taskforce is at mcsilver.nyu.edu.

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