Testimony of J. Corey Feist, JD, MBA
CEO & Co-Founder, Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation

Prepared for the United States Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

Key Agencies Addressed in Testimony: HRSA and NIOSH

"Save Lives, Strengthen the Healthcare Workforce, and Ensure Quality Patient Care: Fully Fund Lorna Breen Act Programs in FY27"

May 5, 2026

Subcommittee Chair Capito, Ranking Member Baldwin, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit public testimony in support of critical programs that save lives, strengthen the healthcare workforce, and ensure quality patient care. On behalf of the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation, whose mission is to reduce burnout and improve the wellbeing of all health workers, I respectfully request full funding in FY27 of $45M for the proven, successful, evidence-informed programs established by the landmark Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act. Specifically, I request $35M for the Health and Public Safety Workforce Resiliency Training Program and the Promoting Resilience and Mental Health among the Health Professional Workforce Program at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and $10M for the transformative education and training initiative supporting health workers' mental health at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH/TAS 75-0953).

On behalf of the millions of health workers who have benefited, and stand to benefit, from these programs and their funding, we offer our sincere thanks to you and your colleagues for recently reauthorizing Lorna Breen Act programs through FY30 as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026 (P.L. 119-75). By reaffirming the value of this work in improving health workers' mental health and wellbeing, you showed our workforce that their lives matter.

Now, we seek full and consistent annual funding so this life-saving work can continue.

We are at a crossroads: we can make the necessary investments to support our caregivers and ensure the future of the workforce, or we can continue to watch our broken system drive health workers from the profession, just when the country will need them the most.

The Mental Health Crisis Plaguing Modern Medicine

My sister-in-law, Dr. Lorna Breen, was a physician leader during the pandemic's first wave in New York City, working around the clock in an environment she described as "Armageddon" with limited PPE, insufficient beds, and patients dying in the hallways. Despite her bravery, she was terrified that seeking mental health support for the trauma she witnessed would cost her the

medical license and career she had spent her entire life working for. Lorna died by suicide on April 26, 2020.

Lorna's story, like so many others, is a heartbreaking example of the mental health crisis plaguing modern medicine. Health workers' mental health is worse than any other segment of the U.S. workforce. Burnout and stress are key factors driving nearly one-fifth of the country's registered nurses to leave the profession by 2029. Over 43% of physicians report at least one symptom of burnout. Burnout rates for health workers are nearing 50% of the workforce.

One of the primary drivers of burnout among health workers is administrative burden. It is estimated that doctors spend two hours on administrative work for every hour they spend with patients; and tasks like charting and paperwork is the number one driver of burnout among physicians. Nurses are also underwater with administrative burden; on average nurses spend about 40% of their shift on documentation rather than patient care. Community pharmacists are struggling too; 35.6% of them rate their workload as excessively high.

Stressful work environments, lack of inclusion in decision-making, and stigma can also negatively affect health workers' mental health.

When health workers don't get the support they need, patient care suffers. In fact, physician burnout is just as responsible, perhaps even more responsible, for medical errors as unsafe workplace conditions.

The Success of the Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act

In the wake of Lorna's tragic death in 2020, our Foundation worked with partners, allies, and Congressional champions to develop the landmark Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act, to protect and strengthen health workers' mental health and wellbeing. Enacted in March 2022, and reauthorized through FY30 in February 2026, this first-and-only-of-its-kind federal law and its funding have already transformed and saved lives, improving the systems in which health workers are educated, trained, and practice.

The law and its funding supported two grant programs and a technical assistance center at HRSA. The grant programs supported 250,000+ health workers through 44 grantees at hospitals, health systems, health professions schools, and community organizations across 24 states to improve their mental health and wellbeing. Most of the grantees provided some type of mental health screening and services to participants and training courses for health workers.

Key successes include a 35% reduction in staff turnover, 37% reduction in burnout rates, a 50% decrease in mental health conditions, and a 47% improvement in job satisfaction. A recent GAO report examining these grant programs confirms a variety of benefits to participants, in addition to those listed above, including improved organizational workflows and positive culture change reducing the stigma associated with mental health conditions.

With continued funding, projects seeking to reduce health workers' administrative burden

would be prioritized, consistent with the reauthorization. Continued funding would also ensure that these vital programs would reach even more health workers in need of relief and support.

The law and its funding also supported NIOSH's *Impact Wellbeing*™ initiative to guide and equip hospitals, clinics, and other care facilities in building a thriving and sustainable workforce. The initiative has already provided 35,000+ healthcare leaders with training materials to address the specific operational factors and burdens that drive their workforce's burnout.

Continued funding for these efforts would ensure more healthcare leaders are able to benefit from these valuable resources and support a community of practice to implement the recommended workplace practices.

With philanthropic support and coalition-building, our Foundation created a national technical assistance center program to accelerate the implementation of the *Impact Wellbeing* Guide: Taking Action to Improve Healthcare Worker Wellbeing. Specifically, we improved access to mental health care for more than 2.64 million licensed health workers and 438,000 credentialed health workers by supporting 70 licensure boards; 1,194 hospitals, freestanding emergency departments, and freestanding surgery centers; and 921 urgent care centers and independent primary care clinics in auditing and removing stigmatizing, intrusive mental health questions from their licensing and credentialing applications.

The Imperative to Act: We Must Invest Now in Workforce Retention to Protect Our Future

We can't afford to wait to fund Lorna Breen Act programs, the stakes are too high. Both for health workers like Lorna and the future of our healthcare workforce.

HRSA currently projects shortages of over 354,000 nurses, 141,000 physicians (including over 70,000 primary care physicians such as geriatricians), 53,000 dentists and dental hygienists, and 30,000 pharmacists in 2038. In 2038, rural areas and small towns will experience a projected 39% shortage of primary care physicians. These projections do not fully account for the hundreds of thousands of clinicians deciding to leave their professions early because of system failures driving their burnout and distress.

These shortages will coincide with a major demographic shift. Over the next decade, we will see the number of Americans aged 65 and older rise from 58 million in 2022 to 82 million by 2050, a 42% increase. We will not be able to care for older adults if we do not care for those who care for them.

Tens of billions of dollars are directed annually for healthcare workforce creation initiatives, but the Lorna Breen Act programs are the only ones to directly support workforce retention. Our nation's massive federal investment in the healthcare workforce pipeline is effectively squandered if we fail to stop the leaks at the other end by retaining qualified health workers. For example, we are facing a "two-year exodus," where approximately 50% of new nurses quit the profession within two years of graduation.

Funding Lorna Breen Act Programs has Broad Bipartisan Support On and Off the Hill

The successful, evidence-informed programs established by the Lorna Breen Act are critical to building a healthcare system where health workers thrive, making our healthcare system stronger, safer, and more effective. Members of Congress, national stakeholder organizations across healthcare, and a nationwide, grassroots movement of health workers and their families agree, and are all calling for these programs to be fully funded in FY27.

Thanks to Sens. Kaine and Young's longstanding leadership and dedication to our healthcare workforce, the Lorna Breen Act was introduced, enacted, and fully funded. They championed its recent reauthorization and led a bipartisan group of 21 of your colleagues in a letter to your subcommittee requesting full funding for Lorna Breen Act programs in FY27.

Reps. Dingell and Kiggans led the reauthorization of the Lorna Breen Act in the House of Representatives, securing a bipartisan group of 80 cosponsors, the endorsement of the Problem Solver's Caucus, and supporting the reauthorization's inclusion in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026. They recently submitted a letter signed by many of their colleagues in support of this funding request to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies.

A coalition of nearly 75 national organizations across healthcare, including the American Medical Association and the American Nursing Association, also supports this funding request and has sent a letter to your subcommittee to that effect.

Advocates across the country, including health workers and their family members, friends, and colleagues, have also sent 18,000+ messages to Congress in support of the reauthorization and funding for Lorna Breen Act programs.

The reauthorization of the Lorna Breen Act is a historic win, but reauthorization without funding is a hollow promise.

This subcommittee – with your collective voice – can save lives and invest in our future by funding Lorna Breen Act programs in FY27 and beyond.

Thank you for your leadership and for protecting those who protect us.