

July 6, 2023

The Honorable Tina Smith
720 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Murphy
136 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Smith and Senator Murphy;

The undersigned members of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) write in support of the *Mental Health Services for Students Act*. This legislation would provide on-site school and community-based mental health services to public school students, helping schools and families to identify students who need mental health services and connect them with the care they need.

Young people are facing significant mental health challenges that, if unaddressed, can lead to difficulties at home and in school and interfere with a child's healthy development. The CDC estimates that as many as 1 out of 5 children experience a mental disorder and suicide continues to be a leading cause of death for youth and young adults ages 10-24.¹ In 2021, nearly 60% of female students reported having persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, about 10% attempted suicide, and 25% made a suicide plan.² Unfortunately, 49.4% of youth suffering with mental health disorders do not receive treatment from mental health professionals.³

Early identification of mental health challenges is important so that children can get the help they need. Educators are often the first to notice if a student is struggling or if there are changes in behavior, making schools well-positioned to offer early interventions and mental health services.⁴ School-based mental health services can also reduce barriers to access for underserved populations.⁵

The *Mental Health Services for Students Act* would help schools address the mental health challenges facing young people by providing funding to strengthen school-based mental health services, including screening, treatment, and outreach programs. The bill provides funding for schools to build partnerships with health care providers, child welfare agencies, and other community-based service systems, as well as training for teachers to identify the signs and symptoms of mental disorders, risk of suicide, and trauma exposure. The bill also supports development of best practices for the delivery of mental health care in school-based settings.

The *Mental Health Services for Students Act* can play a pivotal role in comprehensively addressing youth mental health in schools and incentivizing school districts to take critical steps to improve student wellbeing. We thank you for introducing this important legislation, and we urge the bill's swift passage.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/access.html>

² https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf

³ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2724377?guestAccessKey=f689aa19-31f1-481d-878a-6bf83844536a>

⁴ <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/educators>

⁵ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/pdf/10.1377/hlthaff.2018.05472>

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

ACTNow for Mental Health (ANMH)

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Psychological Association

American Psychiatric Association

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Children's Hospital Association

Clinical Social Work Association

Crisis Text Line

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice

Inseparable

International OCD Foundation

International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

Mental Health America

NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association for County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

National Association for Rural Mental Health

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Association of School Psychologists

National Eating Disorders Association

National Federation of Families

National League for Nursing

Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies

Residential Eating Disorders Consortium

RI International

Sandy Hook Promise

School Social Work Association of America

SMART Recovery

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America

The Jed Foundation

The Kennedy Forum

The Trevor Project

Trust for America's Health