

May 10, 2022,

The Honorable Anna Eshoo
United States House of Representatives
272 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Brian Fitzpatrick
United States House of Representatives
271 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States House of Representatives
1724 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Eshoo, Fitzpatrick and Blunt Rochester,

Thank you for your leadership in introducing H.R. 7236, the Strengthen Kids' Mental Health Now Act. In order to stem the crisis in children's mental health, we must ensure that federal programs are tailored to meet the unique needs of children and adolescents. This legislation makes long overdue investments in child and adolescent mental health and the pediatric mental health professionals who serve them across the continuum of care, while taking important steps to improve children's ability to receive the right care, in the right setting and at the right time.

As champions of children's mental health, you know that the emergency we currently face did not just begin with COVID-19. A study in JAMA Pediatrics found significant increases in children being diagnosed with anxiety (27%) and depression (24%) between 2016-2020.¹ Within the same time period, children's hospitals experienced a steep rise in the number of emergency department and inpatient visits for suicidal thoughts or self-harm, with visits more than doubling.² Suicide rates among Black children have been on the rise, with Black children under age 12 twice as likely to die by suicide compared to white peers.³ Well before COVID-19, children's mental health conditions were common, with 1 in 5 children experiencing a mental health condition each year. Unfortunately, too many children went without mental health care, often waiting years between the onset of symptoms and beginning treatment.

Over the past two years, children and their parents and caregivers have faced immense challenges, including prolonged stress and uncertainty, disruption in their daily routines, social isolation, financial instability and, for too many families, grief over lost loved ones. These circumstances have further strained the mental health of kids and teens. A recent report found that 200,000 children have lost parents or primary caregivers to

¹ Lebrun-Harris LA, Ghandour RM, Kogan MD, Warren MD. [Five-Year Trends in US Children's Health and Well-being, 2016-2020](#). JAMA Pediatrics. March 14, 2022.

² Children's Hospital Association (CHA), analysis of CHA PHIS database, n=38 children's hospitals.

³ Wenner Moyer, Melinda. [Suicide Rates Rise in a Generation of Black Youth](#). Scientific American. Sept. 29, 2021.

COVID-19, with families of color disproportionately impacted.⁴ According to the CDC, 4 in 10 teens reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and 1 in 5 reported that they have contemplated suicide in 2021, a notable increase from previous years.⁵ The impact of pandemic-related adversities children have faced will continue to take a toll in years to come. We must respond now to ensure children can receive the support they need to cope with mental health conditions and grow into healthy adulthood.

A long history of underinvestment in pediatric mental health services, including both the pediatric mental health workforce and necessary infrastructure to deliver high-quality care to children at every level of need, has contributed to a [national emergency](#) in children's mental health. The Strengthen Kids' Mental Health Now Act takes important steps to prioritize well-coordinated and integrated systems of care that are prepared to deliver culturally competent, developmentally appropriate mental health care to children across a range of settings.

We strongly support H.R. 7236, the Strengthen Kids' Mental Health Now Act, which:

- Bolsters support for pediatric mental health care through Medicaid with enhanced reimbursement and improved Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit implementation.
- Supports community-based pediatric mental health services and innovative solutions to increase care coordination and integration.
- Invests in developing and growing the pediatric mental health workforce.
- Expands our national capacity to provide care to children across the continuum of care, including for those who require inpatient treatment and step-down levels of care.

We thank you for your commitment to strengthening children's mental health and ensuring that our federal programs are specifically tailored to address this crisis. We look forward to working together to advance H.R. 7236, the Strengthen Kids' Mental Health Now Act, so that more children, in communities nationwide, can receive the mental health services and support they need as they grow and develop.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association

⁴ Imperial College London, [COVID-19 Orphanhood: United States of America](#), April 5, 2022.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [Morbidity and Mortality Week Report: Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey, January – June 2021](#), April 1, 2022.

American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Society of Addiction Medicine
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Children's Hospital Association
Clinical Social Work Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition
First Focus Campaign for Children
Girls Inc.
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 Behavioral Healthcare
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Federation of Families
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
Psychotherapy Action Network
REDC Consortium
RI International
Sandy Hook Promise
SMART Recovery
The Jed Foundation
The Jewish Federations of North America
The Kennedy Forum
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
Treatment Communities of America
Trinity Health
Trust for America's Health