

September 21, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy,

On behalf of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), we ask that you bring forward for House floor consideration legislation recently reported out of the Energy & Commerce Committee to help prevent youth suicide and intervene early to support youth mental health. As Congress works to continue to respond to the outbreak, it is essential to prioritize the public's mental health and mitigate suicidal risks stressed by the social, economic, and health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent report from the CDC found elevated levels of anxiety and depressive disorders, substance use, and suicidal ideation among Americans.¹ Youth in particular are experiencing increasing mental health effects, with recent data from Mental Health America showing that youth between the ages of 11-17 are now at higher risk of moderate to severe anxiety and depression, with a 14% increase in screening for anxiety and 10% increase in screening for depression.² Given that prior to the national pandemic, the second leading cause of death for youth was already suicide, we urge Congress to immediately consider taking action.

Despite suggestions that the mental health crises and suicide rates will worsen, this is not inevitable and can be prevented. By making our nation's mental health an urgent consideration, we can address previous and present concerns and look ahead to effectively mitigate future needs beyond the crisis. We urge you to bring forth the following bipartisan pieces of legislation reported out by the Energy & Commerce Committee:

- 1) **H.R. 7293– The STANDUP Act of 2020:** The bipartisan Rep. Peters (D-CA) and Bilirakis (R-FL) STANDUP Act of 2020 provides resources and technical assistances to States, Tribes, and schools on student suicide prevention awareness and training, and requires SAMHSA Project AWARE grantees to implement school policies for student suicide prevention awareness and training. 70% of students who die by suicide will tell someone of their plans or give a warning sign.³ Equipping our schools with evidence-based suicide prevention policies will allow all stakeholders in the school community, including students, to be the eyes and ears and to speak up when they see or hear one of these signs from a peer/student.
- 2) **H.R.1109– The Mental Health Services for Students Act:** The bipartisan Rep. Napolitano (D-CA) and Katko (R-PA) Mental Health Services for Students Act provides funding for public schools across the country to partner with local mental health professionals to establish on-site mental health care services for students. This legislation will provide \$130,000,000 in competitive

¹ Czeisler MÉ, Lane RI, Petrosky E, et al. Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:1049–1057. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6932a1>

² <https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/Coronavirus%20Mental%20Health%20Presentation%208-1-2020.pdf>

³ Robins, E., Gassner, S., Kayes, J., Wilkinson, R.H., & Murphy, G.E. (1959). The communication of suicidal intent: A study of 134 consecutive cases of successful (completed) suicide. Am J Psychiatry, 115(8), 724-733.

grants of up to \$2 million each through SAMHSA's Project AWARE to give students licensed mental health professionals they need for support.⁴

- 3) **H.R. 4861– Effective Suicide Screening and Assessment in the Emergency Department Act:** The bipartisan Rep. Bilirakis (R-FL) and Rep. Engel (D-NY) Effective Suicide Screening and Assessment in the Emergency Department Act assists emergency departments to develop better suicide risk protocols through the Department of Health and Human Services. Prior to the national pandemic, the number of teens and children visiting emergency rooms for considering or attempting suicide doubled from 2007 to 2015.⁵ The emergency department is often the place within the health care system that provides care for patients with suicide-risk factors, with approximately 10% of emergency department patients presenting suicidal ideations. 39% of patients visiting an Emergency Department following a suicide attempt will go on to reattempt suicide within a year. This legislation will provide training to emergency health care providers, establish policies to improve identification and treatment of individuals at high risk, employ additional behavioral health professionals, and improve access to care for patients.
- 4) **H.R. 5469– The Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2019:** The Rep. Watson Coleman (D-NJ) Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2019 is the first comprehensive federal legislation to addresses increasing suicide rates and mental health disorders among Black youth. If enacted, the bill would: provide grants for culturally appropriate mental health services in schools and community settings; increase funding for research into mental health disparities in youth of color; increase support for efforts to diversify the behavioral health workforce; and establish a commission to examine the effects of Smartphones and social media on adolescent mental health.

With the alarming increase in risk for youth suicide, and September being both back-to-school and National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, we urge you to bring these youth suicide and mental health policies to the floor for a vote this month. Thank you for considering the COVID-19 crisis' impact on the public's mental health needs. We appreciate your leadership during these challenging times and are ready to assist in responding to this major public health threat.

Sincerely,

2020 MOM

American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Suicidology

American Counseling Association

American Dance Therapy Association

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

⁴ Note the September 9, 2020 Energy & Commerce Committee markup lowered this amount from \$200M to \$130M.

⁵ Burstein, Brett; Agostino, Holly; Greenfield, Brian. (April 8, 2019). Suicidal Attempts and Ideation Among Children and Adolescents in US Emergency Departments, 2007-2015. *JAMA Pediatr.* 173 (6): 598-600. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.0464

American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological 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
Clinical Social Work Association
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)
Council on Social Work Education
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Education Development Center
Emergency Nurses Association
Girls Inc.
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
International OCD Foundation
Legal Action Center
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
Mental Health America
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors (NACBHDD)
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD)
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Register of Health Service Psychologists

Postpartum Support International

Residential Eating Disorders Consortium

Sandy Hook Promise

Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America

The Kennedy Forum

The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

The Trevor Project

Trust for America's Health

Well Being Trust