

April 25, 2024

The Honorable Robert Aderholt  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and  
Human Services, and Education  
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and  
Human Services, and Education  
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and  
Human Services, and Education  
Senate Appropriations Committee

Re: Addressing the Shortages of School Mental Health Professionals in FY2025

Dear Chairman Aderholt, Chairwoman Baldwin, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Ranking Member Moore Capito:

As you develop the FY2025 appropriations bill for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, the 204 undersigned national, state, and local organizations encourage you to address the severe shortages of school-based mental health professionals (e.g., school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers) by providing robust investments in two critical grant programs. We request \$250M to be divided between the Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration (MHSP) Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services (SBMH) Grant programs—without cutting funding from other education programs. Both programs are funded via Safe Schools National Activities within the Department of Education, and this level of investment will provide continuation funds for ongoing projects and allow for new grant awards. Collectively, these investments will help local and state education agencies (LEAs and SEAs) address significant and pervasive workforce shortages and support increased access to the comprehensive mental and behavioral health services necessary to support student wellbeing and improve student learning.

Last Congress, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act made important strides in investing in the MHSP and SBMH grant programs. We applaud Congress for these historic investments; however, more investment is still needed, especially as current grantees are nearing the end of their grant period and the demand for this funding remains high. The data clearly support the positive impact these grants have on addressing workforce shortages and increasing the number of students who receive school mental and behavioral health services. Given the unprecedented needs of our students, we must continue to build on this bipartisan legislation.

Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health service delivery systems promote wellness, resiliency, motivation and engagement, skill-building, and self-advocacy skills. School mental and behavioral health professionals partner with parents and families to support students' wellbeing at school, at home, and in life, and adequate access to school-employed mental health professionals improves delivery and integration of school-wide programming to foster positive school climate, prevent violence, and balance physical and psychological safety. Without a highly qualified workforce of school-employed mental health professionals, schools lack the capacity to provide comprehensive mental health promotion,

prevention, early intervention, and other direct services, as well as important academic interventions and supports.

These services are more important than ever as our country continues to experience a youth mental health crisis, which the U.S. Surgeon General has referred to as a public health crisis. Approximately 40 percent of children will experience a mental health concern by 7th grade, and each year, one in five students will experience a mental and behavioral health concern that rises to the level of a clinical diagnosis. Rather than addressing mental health needs when they arise to the level of a crisis, which is evidenced by the surge of pediatric emergency room visits and hospitalizations related to mental health concerns, a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention is needed. Schools play a vital role in these efforts. Although most students who need mental health services do not receive them, of those that do, the vast majority access care at school.

Importantly, students are much more likely to seek mental health support if it is available at school, and school mental health professionals bridge communication and access to services between families, schools, and community resources. It is imperative that we increase access to school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, and other qualified professionals so that students have access to a full range of mental and behavioral health services and have support in accessing any community-based care they may require.

Districts have engaged in intentional efforts to expand access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services, but these plans are hampered, and in some cases halted altogether, due to the critical shortages of these and other qualified school-based mental health professionals. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a ratio of one school psychologist per 500 students to ensure access to comprehensive services and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) both recommend a ratio of 1:250. However, current national ratios for each profession are well above what is recommended. Our students deserve better.

Pervasive workforce shortages leave many communities with limited or no access to mental and behavioral health care in the school setting. For many students, especially those in under-resourced and rural areas, schools are the only available source of mental and behavioral health care, and workforce shortages leave them with no access to critical care. To solve this problem, we must address the workforce pipeline by increasing the availability and affordability of graduate education opportunities, including through Grow Your Own programs; facilitating partnerships between institutions of higher education and high needs LEAs; and helping SEAs and LEAs build the capacity to recruit, train, and retain a robust workforce of school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers. These investments will do just that.

We urge you to help address the youth mental health crisis and improve access to supports for students by providing \$250M to be divided between the Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program. There is strong bipartisan support for these federal investments, and, most importantly, this funding is greatly needed to help increase school capacity to provide comprehensive mental and behavioral health services to all students. Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you to make sure students in every school and community are supported to reach their maximum potential.

Sincerely,

National Association of School Psychologists  
American Psychological Association  
American School Counselor Association  
School Social Work Association of America  
AASA, The School Superintendents Association  
AFT: Education, Healthcare, Public Services  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Atheists  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESAs)  
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)  
Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice  
Boys & Girls Clubs of America  
Center for Educational Improvement  
CenterLink: The Community of LGBTQ Centers  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Children's Hospital Association  
Committee for Children  
Common Sense Media  
Council of Administrators of Special Education  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, & Action  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice  
GLSEN  
Healthy Schools Campaign  
Inseparable  
International OCD Foundation  
Mental Health America  
MENTOR  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Council for the Social Studies  
National Education Association  
National Federation of Families  
National PTA  
National Rural Education Association  
Nemours Children's Health  
REDC Consortium  
Sandy Hook Promise  
School-Based Health Alliance  
The Education Trust  
The Jed Foundation

The Kennedy Forum  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
TransFamily Support Services  
Alabama Association of School Psychologists  
Alaska School Psychologist Association  
Arizona Association of School Psychologists  
Arizona PTA  
Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania  
California Association of School Psychologists  
California State PTA  
CAMP Rehoboth Community Center  
Colorado Society of School Psychologists  
Colors+  
Connecticut Association of School Psychologists  
Delaware Association of School Psychologists  
Delaware Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics  
Diversity Center of Oklahoma Inc.  
Florida Association of School Psychologist  
Florida School Counselor Association  
Georgia Association of School Psychologists  
Guilford Green Foundation & LGBTQ Center  
Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists  
Hawaii State PTSA  
Hudson Pride  
Idaho School Counselor Association  
Idaho School Psychologist Association  
Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education  
Illinois School Counselor Association  
Illinois School Psychologists Association  
inclusion tennessee  
Indiana Association of School Psychologists  
Indiana School Counselor Association  
Iowa School Counselor Association  
Iowa School Psychologists Association  
Kaleidoscope Youth Center  
Kansas Association of School Psychologists  
Kentucky Association for Psychology in the Schools  
Kentucky School Counselor Association  
Lancaster LGBTQ+ Coalition  
LGBT Community Network  
Lone Star State School Counselor Association  
Louisiana School Psychological Association  
Magnolia State School Counselor Association  
Maine Association of School Psychologists  
Maryland School Psychologists' Association  
Massachusetts School Psychologists Association  
Michigan Association of School Psychologists

Michigan School Counselor Association  
Minnesota School Counselor Association  
Minnesota School Psychologists Association  
Missouri Association of School Psychologists  
Missouri School Counselor Association  
Montana Association of School Psychologists  
Montana School Counselor Association  
Nebraska PTA  
Nebraska School Psychologist Association  
Nevada Association of School Psychologists  
New Jersey Association of School Psychologists  
New Jersey Parent Teacher Association  
New Jersey PTA  
New Jersey School Counselor Association  
New Mexico Association of School Psychologists  
New Mexico PTA  
New York Association of School Psychologists  
New York State School Counselor Association  
North Carolina School Psychology Association  
North Dakota Association of School Psychologists  
Ohio Council for the Social Studies  
Ohio School Counselor Association  
Ohio School Psychologists Association  
Oklahoma School Psychological Association  
one-n-ten  
Openhouse  
Oregon PTA  
Oregon School Counseling Association  
Oregon School Psychologists Association  
Our Family Coalition  
Pennsylvania Congress of Parents and Teachers Association  
Pennsylvania School Counselors Association  
QUEERSPACE collective  
Rainbow Families  
Rhode Island School Counselor Association  
Rhode Island School Psychologists Association  
School Administrators Association of New York State  
School Nurse Organization of Washington  
Sincecombahee Educational Consulting  
South Carolina Association of School Psychologists  
South Dakota Association of School Psychologist  
Tennessee Association of School Psychologists  
Texas Association of School Psychologists  
Thorne Harbour Health  
TransYouth Liberation  
Utah Association of School Psychologists  
Vermont Association of School Psychologists

Vermont Principals' Association  
Virginia Academy of School Psychologists  
Virginia School Counselor Association  
Washington School Counselor Association  
Washington State Association of School Psychologists  
Washington State PTA  
We Are Family  
West Virginia School Counselor Association  
West Virginia School Psychologists Association  
Wisconsin Council for the Social Studies  
Wisconsin School Counselor Association  
Wisconsin School Psychologists Association  
Wyoming School Psychology Association  
Youth Oasis  
Youth Pride, Inc.  
All Under One Roof LGBT Advocates of Southeastern Idaho  
Capitol Area Reentry Program Inc. Out of the Box LGBTQ Center  
Caribbean Equality Project  
Centre LGBT+  
Charlotte Trans Health  
Compass LGBTQ Community Center  
Educators for Excellence  
Grand Rapids Pride Center  
Guilford Green Foundation & LGBTQ Center  
Inside Out Youth Services  
Jackson Pride Center, Jackson MI  
Lahainaluna High School PTSA  
LGBT Center of Raleigh  
LGBT Center of SE Wisconsin  
LGBT Life Center  
LIAM Foundation  
Los Angeles Unified School District  
Muncie OUTreach LGBTQ+ Center  
Naples Pride  
New Bern Pride  
New Mexico Regional Education Cooperatives Association  
Omaha ForUs  
Our Center  
Out On The Lakeshore  
OutCenter Southwest Michigan  
Positive Images  
Pride Center of Staten Island  
Pride Center of Terre Haute Inc.  
Pride Community Center, Brazos Valley Texas  
Prism Counseling & Community Services  
QTAPI  
Queermunity

Rainbow Connections ATX, a program of Family Eldercare  
Rainbow Labs  
Rainbow Rose Center  
Safe Schools South Florida  
Sheyenne Valley Special Education Unit  
Shoals Diversity Center  
Supporting and Mentoring Youth Advocates and Leaders (SMYAL)  
Solano Pride Center  
Spencer Pride, Inc.  
St. Louis Queer Support & Healing (SQSH)  
The Center on Colfax  
The Human Rights Alliance  
The Mahogany Project  
The Pride Center at Equality Park  
The Rainbow Bridge Community Center  
U.S. Virgin Islands School Counselor Association  
Washington County Gay Straight Alliance, Inc.  
Western Montana LGBTQ+ Community Center  
Youth OUTright WNC