

March 22, 2023

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 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 FY2024

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

As you develop the FY2024 appropriations bill for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, the 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 3 critical grant programs.

We request \$428M to be divided between the School-Based Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program. Both programs are funded via Safe Schools National Activities within the Department of Education, and this level of investment will allow for new grant awards to support LEA and SEA efforts to address workforce shortages and increase access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services. We also request \$300M for IDEA Part D, Section 662 (Personnel Preparation) which can be used to prepare school psychologists and other specialized instructional support personnel, early interventionists, and others to support the academic success, mental and behavioral health, and overall well-being of children and youth with disabilities. Collectively, these investments will help address the significant and pervasive workforce shortages and support increased access to comprehensive mental and behavioral health services necessary to support student wellbeing and improve student learning.

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 social and emotional learning and mental, behavioral, and academic interventions and supports. These services are more important than ever as our country continues to experience a youth mental health crisis, which the US 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 in 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 an important 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.

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, national ratios for all professions are more than double what is recommended. Our students deserve better. Districts have engaged in intentional efforts to expand access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services, however, these plans are hampered, and in some cases halted all together, due to the critical shortages of these and other qualified school mental health professionals.

Pervasive workforce shortages result in little, if any, mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention services and leaves many students without any 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 (IHE) and high needs LEAs; and helping State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) build the capacity to recruit, train, and retain a robust workforce of school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers.

There is strong bi-partisan support for federal investment to adequately address the mental health workforce shortages and increase LEA and SEA capacity to provide comprehensive school mental health services to all students by implementing strategies based on their unique needs. We urge you to help address the youth mental health crisis and improve access to supports for students, including those specialized services for student with disabilities by providing \$428M for to be divided between the School-Based Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program and \$300M for IDEA Part D, Section 662 (Personnel Preparation). Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you to make sure students in every community are supported to reach their maximum potential.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Federation of Teachers
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Music Therapy Association
American Psychological Association
American School Counselor Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA)
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Center for Learner Equity
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Colorado Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) Services
Committee for Children
Common Sense Media
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, & Action
EDGE Consulting Partners
Education Reform Now
GLSEN
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE)
Inseparable
International OCD Foundation
International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Mental Health America
MENTOR
NASSP
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of School Psychologists
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Education Association
National League for Nursing
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
REDC Consortium
RI International
Sandy Hook Promise
School-Based Health Alliance
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children (TED)
The American Counseling Association
The Education Trust
The Jed Foundation

State Organizations

Arizona Association of School Psychologists
Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania
California Association of School Psychologists
Colorado Society of School Psychologists
Connecticut Association of School Psychologists

Delaware Association of School Psychologists
Florida School Counselor Association
Georgia Association of School Psychologists (GASP)
Hawaii Association of School Psychologists
Idaho School Counselor Association
Illinois School Counselor Association
Illinois School Psychologist Association (ISPA)
Indiana Association of School Psychologists
Iowa School Psychologists Association
Kansas Association of School Psychologists
Lone Star State School Counselor Association
Maine Association of School Psychologists
Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives
Massachusetts School Psychologists Association
Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators
Michigan Association of School Psychologists
Minnesota School Psychologists Association
Missouri Association of School Psychologists (MASP)
Missouri School Counselor Association
Montana Association of School Psychologists
Montana School Counselor Association
Nebraska School Psychologists Association
New Jersey Association of School Psychologists
New Mexico Regional Educational Cooperatives Association
New York Association of School Psychologists
North Carolina School Counselor Association
North Carolina School Psychology Association
North Dakota Association of School Psychologists
North Dakota School Counselor Association
Ohio Inter-University Council (IUC)
Oklahoma School Psychological Association
Oregon School Psychologists Association
Pennsylvania School Counselors Association
Rhode Island School Psychologists Association
Tennessee School Counselor Association
Texas Association of School Psychologists
Utah Association of School Psychologists
West Virginia School Psychologists Association

Local Organizations

Bi-County Collaborative
CAPS Collaborative
Columbus City Schools
Educators for Excellence

LABBB Collaborative

Los Angeles Unified School District

Northshore Education Consortium

San Diego Unified School District

Sheyenne Valley Special Education Unit

Shore Educational Collaborative