

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