

July 14, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman, U.S Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
154 Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
217 Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States house of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Chairman Pallone, and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers:

On behalf of the undersigned Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) member organizations, we express our strong support for the bipartisan Children and Media Research Advancement Act, or CAMRA Act (H.R. 2161/S. 971), led by Senators Markey (D-MA), Sasse (R-NE), Schatz (D-HI), Blunt (R-MO), Bennet (D-CO) and Collins (R-ME) and by Representatives Raskin (D-MD-08), Gonzalez (R-OH), and Trahan (D-MA). We urge you to bring this piece of legislation forward within your respective committees.

This bill would authorize the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to dedicate funding to research the impacts of various forms of media and technology on infants, children, and adolescents. The bill requires that this research must be focus on the impact social media and other screen-based content has on the cognitive and social-emotional development of our nation's kids.

COVID-19 has only exacerbated our child and adolescent mental health crisis. Mental Health America's 2021 State of Mental Health Report showed youth ages 11-17 were more likely than any other age group to score for moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression.¹ A recent report from the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 25% of high school students reported worsened emotional and cognitive health during the pandemic.² Certain communities have borne the brunt of this tragic escalation as suicide rates among American Indian and Alaskan Native adolescents (ages 15-19) are 60% higher than the national average for all teenagers,³ and Black boys (ages 5-12 years old) are now twice as likely to die by suicide compared to their white peers.⁴

It is important that efforts be made to better understand the role increased interaction with various forms of media during the pandemic may be playing in these concerning trends. It is reported that the daily

¹ Mental Health America. (2021). *The State Of Mental Health In America*. MHA. Retrieved from <https://mhanational.org/get-involved/download-2021-state-mental-health-america-report>

² Panchal, N., Kamal, R., Cox, C., Chidambaram, P., & Garfield, R. (2021). Mental Health and Substance Use Considerations Among Children During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *KFF*. Retrieved from <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/mental-health-and-substance-use-considerations-among-children-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

³ Ibid (1)

⁴ Bridge, J., Horowitz, L., Fontanella, C., Sheftall, A., Greenhouse, J., Kelleher, K., & Campo, J. (2018). Age-Related Racial Disparity in Suicide Rates Among US Youths From 2001 Through 2015. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 172(7), 697. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.0399

screen time for children in the United States ages 4-15 has doubled since May of last year,⁵ and 63% of parents have reported observing an increase in their children's social media use during the pandemic.⁶ Further research is needed to determine how this surge in media usage among children and adolescents may be impacting specific mental health conditions; for example, in-depth research is needed beyond preliminary studies indicating the more time 9- and 10-year-old children spent on screens, the more likely they are to engage in uncontrolled binge eating.⁷

We have deep appreciation for each of your committee's commitment to addressing youth mental health. In order to continue creating informed policy solutions to support the development of our nation's children and youth, we must have a better understanding of the role media plays in their lives. We urge you to bring this piece of legislation forward for consideration in your respective committees and we look forward to continuing to work with each of you.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Clinical Social Work Association

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

Mental Health America

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

⁵ Ritchel, M. (2021). Children's Screen Time Has Soared in the Pandemic, Alarming Parents and Researchers. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/16/health/covid-kids-tech-use.html>

⁶ Parenting Teens in the Age of Social Media. (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.luriechildrens.org/en/blog/social-media-parenting-statistics/>

⁷ Nagata JM, Iyer P, Chu J, et al. Contemporary screen time modalities among children 9-10 years old and binge-eating disorder at one-year follow-up: A prospective cohort study. *Int J Eat Disord.* 2021; 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.23489>

National Association for Rural Mental Health

National Association of Social Workers

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Federation of Families

REDC Consortium

Sandy Hook Promise

The Jed Foundation

The Trevor Project

Well Being Trust