

Mental Health Liaison Group

September 11, 2017

The Honorable Grace F. Napolitano
United States House of Representatives
1610 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Katko
United States House of Representatives
1620 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Napolitano and Katko:

The undersigned national organizations are writing to express our strong support for the Mental Health in Schools Act (H.R. 2913). We share your vision of making comprehensive school-based mental health services for students available in communities across America. We agree that supporting mental health needs early in life is critical to academic, health, and economic success, and therefore, providing services through schools is imperative. The Mental Health in Schools Act (H.R. 2913) would advance a public health approach to mental health services both in schools and in the community, and has the potential to improve the quality of life for countless children while saving an estimated \$247 billion annually by investing in early intervention programs.

The legislation builds on the highly-effective Safe Schools/Healthy Students program, which strengthens partnerships between local education agencies and community programs including, but not limited to, local primary health, juvenile justice and child welfare entities. It provides funding to place on-site licensed mental health professionals in schools across the country to provide behavioral health services for students and their families at no charge, and it supports community mental health systems to better coordinate with school-based providers, to increase school attendance and improve academic outcomes.

According to the 2009 Institute of Medicine report on mental health prevention and promotion, 50 percent of individuals with a diagnosable mental health disorder will receive a diagnosis by age 14, 75 percent by age of 24, and most will begin experiencing symptoms years before that. Given these facts, programs that better connect health and education systems should be prioritized. The earlier we act, the more effectively we can mitigate or prevent the development of a mental disorder.

The legislation would also provide assistance to communities in order to create comprehensive, evidence-based, age and culture appropriate, trauma-informed services that incorporate strategies of positive behavioral interventions and supports in academic settings. About 70 percent of children in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental illness, according to the Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice. Comprehensive mental and behavioral health services in schools help to address children's behavioral issues from a clinical, as opposed to a disciplinary, approach. Treating kids who act out in school, whether it's frequent outbursts or one violent act of aggression, is seen as a longer-term solution that can lead to a more productive life. Mental health issues are preventable and treatable when children, youth and their families are able to obtain appropriate services and support.

The Mental Health in the Schools Act is a testament to this recognition and we are confident this legislation will help improve children's resilience and ability to succeed in life. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to pass this important legislation as soon as possible.

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers
c/o Laurel Stine, JD, American Psychological Association at lstine@apa.org, Angela Kimball, National Alliance on Mental Illness at akimball@nami.org and Debbie Plotnick, MSS, MLSP, Mental Health America at dplotnick@mentalhealthamerica.net

Sincerely,

American Art Therapy Association
American Dance Therapy Association
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American Association on Health and Disability
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
American Group Psychotherapy Association
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Clinical Social Work Association
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy and Action
EMDR International Association
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
Mental Health America
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Disability Rights Network
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National League for Nursing
Sandy Hook Promise
School Social Work Association of America
The Trevor Project