

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Grassley and Tester,

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates, and other stakeholders is committed to strengthening access to mental health and addiction care in the United States. The MHLG thanks you for introducing the Seeding Rural Resilience Act (S. 2599) to provide mental health support for individuals in farming and rural communities. We want to lend our strong support for this legislation.

Today, 1-in-5 Americans lives with a mental health condition and suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. Individuals in farming and rural communities are particularly at-risk given a variety of factors, including social isolation, economic challenges, inadequate access to mental health resources, and availability of lethal means. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the age-adjusted suicide rate for the most rural counties was nearly twice the rate for the most urban counties in 2017.

Passage of the Seeding Rural Resilience Act would prioritize mental health care in rural settings and empower individuals to adequately respond to their unique mental health stressors. In addition, it would establish a voluntary training program for the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Services in the management of stress experienced by farmers and ranchers, including education on the detection of stress and suicide prevention.

The officers who take advantage of this training program will be in a unique position to recommend mental health care services to farmers, ranchers, and their families who may not otherwise seek care. As the voice for mental health providers and associations, the MHLG finds it important to note that this training does not change the scope of an agent's work; however, it will allow for someone who regularly works within rural communities to be equipped to provide recommendations for mental health services and where to find them.

The Seeding Rural Resilience Act includes a public service campaign to increase accessibility and availability of mental health services while encouraging farmers, ranchers, and their families that help-seeking is a sign of strength. The MHLG applauds the inclusion of a task-force of nongovernmental, State, and local agencies to establish best practices, which will allow for the multi-faceted approach necessary to improve the mental health and stress management for farmers, ranchers, and individuals living in rural areas.

The MHLG thanks you for raising the profile of farmer's mental health and taking steps to deliver resources to these historically underserved communities. There is a need to increase access, availability, and acceptability of mental health care by identifying and understanding the unique challenges that farmers, ranchers, and rural Americans face.

Sincerely,

2020 Moms

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Suicidology

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Nurses Association

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychological Association

Anxiety and Depression of America

American Psychoanalytic Association

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Children and Adults With Attention Deficit Hyperactivity

Clinical Social Work Association

College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Eating Disorders Coalition

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice

Mental Health America

National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

National Association of Social Workers

National Association for Rural Mental Health

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors

National Eating Disorders Association

National Council for Behavioral Health

National Register of Health Service Psychologists

No Health without Mental Health

Postpartum Support International

School Social Work Association of America

SMART Recovery

The American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

The Kennedy Forum

The Trevor Project

Treatment Communities of America