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 live 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