

August 2, 2018

The Honorable Tina Smith
United States Senate
309 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Smith:

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) – a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates, payers and other stakeholders committed to strengthening Americans' access to mental health and addiction care - is pleased to support the Mental Health Services for Students Act of 2018, S. 3337.

We applaud your vision of making comprehensive school-based mental health services and supports for students available in communities across America. As you know, supporting mental and behavioral health needs early in life is critical to academic, health, and economic success, and therefore, providing an array of evidence-based services through schools is imperative. The Mental Health Services for Students Act 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.

The legislation would also provide assistance to communities in order to create comprehensive, evidence-based, developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate, trauma-informed services that incorporate strategies of positive behavioral interventions and supports in academic settings.

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. And because we know mental health issues are preventable and treatable when children, youth and their families can obtain appropriate and timely services and support, the Mental Health Services for Students Act better connects health and education systems.

The MHLG is confident the legislation will help improve children's resilience and ability to succeed in life. We appreciate your leadership and look forward to working with you and your colleagues to pass this important bill.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association on Health and Disability
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
Cities Thrive Coalition
Clinical Social Work Association
Council on Social Work Education
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 for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Disability Rights Network
National Eating Disorders Coalition
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National League for Nursing
Sandy Hook Promise
Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America
School-Based Health Alliance (SBHA) *
School Social Work Association of America
The Kennedy Forum
The Trevor Project

*not a MHLG member