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ITRC Applauds Senators Ed Markey, Jeff Merkley, and Richard Blumenthal for Introducing Landmark “Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act”

Over 115 Organizations Have Endorsed the Legislation Which Will Expand US Approach to Mental Health to Engage Communities in Preventing and Healing Climate and Other Traumas

The International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC)* today heartily praised the introduction of the “Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act” (CMWRA) by Senator Edward Markey (D-MA) and original co-sponsors Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT). The legislation is a companion bill to H.R. 9201, The Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act introduced in the House by Representatives Paul Tonko (D-NY) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and numerous co-sponsors. The legislation will, for the first time, empower communities to prevent and heal mental health problems caused by all types of stressors and adversities, including extreme weather events.

Over 115 national, regional, state, and local mental health, human services, climate, social justice, education, faith, and other organizations have endorsed the CMWRA. Examples of national organizations that have endorsed it include the: *American Psychiatric Association*,

American Psychological Association, and National Alliance on Mental Health, National Association of Social Workers, American Public Health Association, Mental Health America, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, Children’s Environmental Health Network, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, National Council for Mental Wellbeing, Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments, American Lung Association; Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice, EcoAmerica, American Association on Health and Disability, The Kennedy Forum, Health Care Without Harm, PACEs Connection, Climate Psychiatry Alliance, Green Faith, and many others.

Regional, state, and local organizations that have endorsed the CMWRA range from the *New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO)*, to the *New Jersey Education Association, Michigan Clinicians for Climate Action, United Way of the Columbia Willamette in Oregon, Resilient Communities Utah, the Community Resilience Initiative in Walla Walla WA, and Neighborhood Resilience Project in Pittsburgh PA.*

[Click here to see the entire list of organizations that have endorsed the CMWRA.](#)

Comment from Bob Doppelt, Coordinator of the International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC).

"We applaud Senators Markey, Merkley, and Blumenthal for introducing the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act as a companion bill to the bi-partisan H.R. 9201 introduced in the House by Reps. Paul Tonko (D-NY), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), and co-sponsors," said Bob Doppelt, Coordinator of the International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC). "This is truly landmark legislation because it will, for the first time, expand the way our nation addresses mental health and psychosocial problems by engaging entire neighborhoods and communities in using a public health approach to prevent and heal global warming-generated, and many other psychological and emotional traumas. Among many benefits, the CMWRA will enable communities to connect actions that strengthen their residents capacity for mental wellness and resilience with actions to address the climate crisis."

Comments from Other US Mental Health and Human Services Leaders

"The American Psychiatric Association strongly supports the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act, introduced in the Senate by Senator Ed Markey and in the House by Representatives Paul Tonko and Brian Fitzpatrick," said APA CEO and Medical Director Saul Levin, M.D., M.P.A. "This forward-thinking proposal would authorize grants focused on strategies to enhance the ability of communities to confront the mental health impacts of acute and long-term disruptions from natural disasters, as well as other public health impacts of climate change. APA strongly supports this legislation to foster resilience and mental wellness in communities across the nation."

"The National Association of Social Workers sends our deepest thanks to Senator Edward Markey for introducing the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act," said Sarah Butts,

MSW, Director of Public Policy, National Association of Social Workers. "Social workers are on the front line helping individuals, families, and communities remain safe, healthy and resilient during and after adversities. Forming mutual support networks in neighborhoods and communities are key to healing and recovery for those that endure trauma from natural disasters and other stressors. NASW strongly supports this legislation because it will fund community-based initiatives that build individual and collective psychological and emotional resilience."

"It is critical that population health issues related to recurring natural disasters be addressed systematically and quickly. Our nation has not paid nearly enough attention to the psychological consequences of the toxic stress that accompanies climate related natural disasters as well as the other adversities we face." said Dr. David Shern, Senior Associate, Department of Mental Health Bloomberg School of Public Health, Senior Public Health Advisor at National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, and former President/CEO of Mental Health America. "Fortunately, we have tools to address this challenge, but need policies and resources to implement them. The Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act helps to meet these needs."

"We thank Senator Ed Markey for introducing the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act in the Senate," said Katie Huffling, Executive Director, Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments. "Nurses understand the importance of the proactive and holistic approach that is the foundation of mental wellness and resilience. The rapidly worsening climate crisis requires multidisciplinary solutions along with input from and consideration for communities most impacted- the elderly, low income communities, individuals with comorbidities, and the legislation introduced by Senator Markey will go a long way in addressing this need."

"The Trauma Resource Institute applauds Senator Ed Markey's introduction of The Community Mental Wellness and Resiliency Act," said Elaine Miller-Karas, Co-Founder and Director of Innovation at TRI, which helps communities across the US and internationally build resilience to heal trauma. "It is essential to create the infrastructure throughout the nation needed to prepare our citizens for the array of mental health challenges that follow climate events. We thank Senator Markey for taking the initiative to introduce this urgently needed new policy, which will support and fund coordinated community-based resilience building initiatives."

"America's current approach to disasters is too reactionary, providing support after a traumatic event," said Jesse Kohler, Executive Director of the Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice (CTIPP). "This legislation will build community partnerships to help them prepare for disaster. Strong communities heal faster and reduce the mental health consequences that can ripple through the community. We thank Senator Markey for his leadership."

"Following the COVID-19 pandemic, we have renewed urgency to pass the 'Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act,' to ensure all communities can build resilience for all types of adversities," said Becky Turner, Director of Community Engagement for the Community Resilience Initiative in Walla Walla, WA. "We need to follow the science, and put our focus on

weaving trauma-informed and resilience-based practices into the very fabric of our community. Data confirms that the use of resilience-based practices can help communities overcome adversity and related health outcomes. For this reason we strongly support the introduction of the CMWA by Senator Markey."

ITRC Coordinator Bob Doppelt concluded by stating "Given the remarkable number of national, regional, state, and local organizations that have endorsed the CMWRA, it is evident that practitioners nationwide see the urgency of expanding the way we address mental health issues to emphasize community-based initiatives that use a public health approach to help the entire population strengthen their capacity to prevent and heal mental health and psychosocial problems."

* The International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC) is a network of mental health, social services, disaster management, faith, environmental, social justice, education and other professions working to establish methods to prevent and heal the mental health and psychosocial problems generated by the climate emergency and other adversities. Website: <http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/>

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Overview of the "Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act"

[Click here to read the Senate Version of the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act](#)

This urgently needed new policy will, for the first time, authorize the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to fund and support community-based initiatives nationwide that use a public health approach to enhance their entire population's capacity for mental wellness and resilience to prevent and heal climate change-generated and other mental health and psychosocial problems.

This is needed because mental health problems are at epidemic levels today. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic mental health problems were rising nationwide. According to Mental Health America, last year almost 20 percent of adults, or nearly 50 million Americans, experienced a diagnosed mental illness and 5 percent had a severe mental illness. About 8 percent had a substance use disorder, 10 percent experienced an alcohol disorder, and over 11 million adults reported serious thoughts of suicide. In addition, a 2022 CDC survey found that overall, 37 percent of students at public and private high schools reported poor mental health, including stress, anxiety, and depression. A poll by the American Psychiatric Association last year found that 53 percent of adults with children under 18 said they are concerned about the mental state of their children.

The historic storms, floods, wildfires, heatwaves, droughts, and other disasters generated by the accelerating climate emergency are aggravating these problems and creating new ones. In 2021 more than 40 percent of Americans lived in a county that was impacted by a major natural

disaster. Disasters can traumatize 20-40 percent of those who are directly impacted, 10-20 percent of disaster response workers, and 5-10 percent of the general population who are not directly affected but know someone who is or view the events from afar. Consequently, the number of people who experience a mental health problem as a result of a disaster often outweigh those with physical injuries by 40 to 1.

Community traumas are also increasing. This means an overwhelmingly stressful event or series of events, such as wildfires, floods, or mass shootings that traumatize most people residing in a specific neighborhood, town, or city.

Our mental health, human services, and disaster mental health systems cannot assist all of the people who experience mental health problems today, and this gap will only grow over time. In addition, many people will not engage in treatment due to high costs, fears of being stigmatized, injustices embedded in the mental health system, and other reasons.

To reduce today's epidemic of mental health problems, and prevent future ones, the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act will:

- Authorize CDC to establish a grant program to expand existing community-based initiatives and form new ones that use a public health approach to enhance population-level capacity to prevent and heal mental health problems generated by persistent disasters and toxic stresses.
- Appropriate \$30,000,000 for fiscal years 2023 through 2027 to fund small planning grants of up to \$15,000 to help community initiatives get organized, and larger program grants of up to \$4 million to support and help expand existing community wellness and resilience initiatives.
- The community-based initiatives funded by this program will involve a wide and diverse network of grass-roots and neighborhood leaders, and non-profit, private, and public organizations.
- The community initiatives will develop their own age and culturally appropriate strategies to engage all adults and youth in enhancing and sustaining mental wellness and resilience, with high-risk individuals and those with symptoms of pathology given special attention as part of the larger community effort.
- The strategies will use evidence-based, evidence-informed, promising, and/or indigenous practices to engage residents in strengthening existing protective factors, and forming additional ones, to help all adults and youth push back against traumatic stressors, maintain mental wellness, and rapidly recover when they are impacted by toxic stresses or disasters.

- Individualized mental health treatment will support the community-based wellness and resilience building activities and assist people who still cannot function, or are at risk of harming themselves or others.

In sum, the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act provides a much needed expansion of our nation's approach to preventing and healing mental health problems by supporting community-based initiatives.