



[Over 160 Organizations Urge Congress to Promptly Enact the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act](#)

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker United States House of Representatives
2468 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader United States House of Representatives
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

[Letter also attached as a PDF](#)

February 6, 2024

Re: Request to Enact the *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* this Congress

To: Majority Leader Schumer, House Speaker Johnson, and Minority Leaders McConnell and Jeffries:

The International Transformational Resilience Coalition, and more than 160 other organizations listed at the end of this letter, request that Congress enact HR 3073/S 1452, the bi-partisan *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* during this Congress. This urgently needed new legislation will expand our nation's approach to mental health by supporting and funding community-based initiatives that use a public health approach to prevent and heal mental health, behavioral health, and psychosocial problems resulting from accelerating toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters.

In addition to the 160 plus organizations that have endorsed the *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act*, last summer and fall the ITRC hosted two virtual Congressional Briefings on the legislation that both Democratic and Republican members of the House spoke at. Over 1,400 people from across the US registered for each briefing, which indicates widespread interest in the legislation.

The *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* was introduced by co-leads Representatives Paul Tonko (D-NY) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), along with original co-sponsors Don Bacon (R-NE), Mary Peltola (D-AK) and Kathy Castor (D-FL). They have since been joined by co-sponsors David Valadao (R-CA), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Morgan McGarvey (D-KY), Shri Thanedar (D-MI), Donald Davis (D-NC), David Trone (D-MD), Ann Kuster (D-NH), Troy Carter (D-LA), Haley Stevens (D-MI), Brittany Petterson (D-CO), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Jerrold Nader (D-NY), Andrea Salinas (D-OR), Susan Wild (D-PA), Alma Adams (D-NC), Terri Sewell (D-AL),

Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (MI At-Large), Melanie Ann Stansbury (D-NM), Gerald Connolly (D-VA), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D DC-At-Large), Jill Tokuda (D-HI), Josh Harder (D-CA), and Becca Balint (D-VT). A companion bill, S 1452, was introduced in the Senate by Senators Ed Markey (D-MA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI).

The *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* is urgently needed because mental health problems are at epidemic levels today nationwide and constitute a public health emergency. According to Mental Health America, in 2022 almost 20 percent of adults, or nearly 50 million Americans, experienced a diagnosed mental illness and 5 percent had a severe mental illness. 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 found that 53 percent of adults with children under 18 said they are concerned about the mental state of their children.

The record heatwaves, droughts, wind, rain, and snowstorms, hurricanes, floods, wildfires, hazardous smoke events, and other severe stresses, emergencies and disasters the US is experiencing are aggravating these problems and creating many new ones. In 2021 more than 40 percent of Americans lived in a county that was impacted by a major disaster. The events 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 outweighs those with physical injuries by 40 to 1.

Mental health services are essential. However, they do not prevent psychological and emotional distresses or traumas by strengthening the capacity for mental wellness and resilience. In addition, there will never be enough providers to assist all of the individuals who now experience mental health struggles. The number of people needing assistance will only grow as more toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters occur.

The only viable way to reduce today's epidemic of mental health struggles, and prevent future ones, is to actively engage communities in using a public health approach to strengthen the capacity for mental wellness and resilience among all residents for all types of toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters.

A public health approach to mental wellness and resilience focuses on the *entire population*, including but not limited to high-risk individuals and those with symptoms of pathology.

It prioritizes *preventing* psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems before they occur, not merely treating them after they appear, and in many cases integrates mostly group and community-minded methods to *heal* traumas into the prevention methods.

A public health approach to mental wellness and resilience accomplishes these goals by actively engaging residents in activities that strengthen *protective factors*—social support networks, local resources, trauma and resilience-informed knowledge and skills, and other assets—that enable them to

buffer themselves from the forces that undermine their wellness and resilience and find new meaning, purpose, and hope in adversities.

From the [Healthy and Resilient Communities Initiative](#) in North Carolina to [Peace4Tarpon](#) in Florida and the [Community Resilience Initiative](#) in Washington State, numerous community-based mental wellness and resilience building initiatives are underway throughout the U.S. They have shown that by engaging local residents and organizations in implementing a range of age and culturally-tailored strategies, community becomes medicine for psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems.

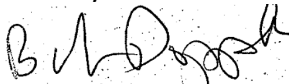
The top problem almost all of the initiatives have struggled with, however, is securing start-up funds. This makes it very difficult for new initiatives to get organized. Many also struggle to secure ongoing operational funds, which diminishes their effectiveness or causes some to close.

The support and funding provided by *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* will address these problems by providing both planning grants to enable local initiatives to get organized, and program grants to support the ongoing operations of community-based initiatives as well as a technical assistance program to help communities develop grant proposals and learn from each other.

It is important to note that, because our bodies and minds are not separate, there is significant co-morbidity between mental health and physical health problems. This means that social, psychological, and emotional problems often aggravate existing, or can directly cause physical health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, some cancers, and mor. Using a public health approach in communities to prevent and heal mental health, behavioral health, and psychosocial problems will therefore also help reduce physical health problems, which can help reduce the pressures on the nation's health care system.

For these reasons the organizations below that endorse the legislation, and the International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC), urge you to expand our nation's approach to preventing and healing mental health and psychosocial problems by enacting the *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* this year.

Thank you for considering this request.



Bob Doppelt
Coordinator

International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC)

Organizational Endorsers of HR 3017/S 1452 *The Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act*

International Transformational Resilience Coalition
National Association of State Mental Health Directors
National Alliance of Mental illness (NAMI)
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Mental Health America
American Public Health Association
National Association of Social Workers
National Rural Health Association
Illinois Association for Infant Mental Health
Rural Opportunity Institute
National Association of Regional Councils
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National League for Nursing
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
National Association of Community Health Workers
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Clinical Social Work Association
Save the Children
National Federation of Families
American Association on Health and Disability
The Jed Foundation
National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives
International Society for Psychiatric Nurses
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
Alliance for Positive Health
Rural Health Network of SCNY
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
American Lung Association
Association of Clinicians for the Underserved (ACU)
Congressional Research Institute for Social Work and Policy
National Association of School Psychologists
Psychotherapy Action Network
Trauma & Resilience Initiative Inc.
Unitarian Universalist Mental Health Network
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments
American Association on Health and Disability
Clinical Social Work Association
National Compadres Network
The Kennedy Forum
The Resiliency Group
Community Resilience Initiative
Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative
Trauma Resource Institute
Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy & Practice
Interfaith Power & Light
Climate Mental Health Network
New Leaf Counseling LLC
San Francisco Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility
Whatcom Family & Community Network
International OCD Foundation
UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center
Mental Health America of the Palm Beaches
American Family Therapy Academy, Inc.
American Counseling Association
Health Care Without Harm
Children's Environmental Health Network
Prevention Institute
Peace4Tarpon
Start Early
Birch Bay-Blaine Thrives
Physicians for Social Responsibility Maine Chapter
The Resiliency Initiative
Beaver Hollow
Metta Foundation
Lieberman Group, Inc.
Jen Johnson, MS, MFA, LCMHC
NH Healthcare Workers for Climate Action
Resilience Climbing
Sabater Laboratory for Psychological Innovations Inc
Able-Differently
Reaching Resiliency
Michigan Clinicians for Climate Action
One Shared Spirit
Seneca County Community Schools
Trauma Healing Project
Emory University's Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing
Visible Hands Collaborative
The Children's Agenda
American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare
Earthday.org
Climate Resilience Leadership, LLC
SolaVida
MUYUMPA - Centro de Formación en Terapia Comunitaria
Thinkwell, LLC.
Lieberman Group, Inc.
Win Climate
Climate Psychology Alliance - North America
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
Jennifer G. Gordon PhD PC
Organic Intelligence
The Blueford Group
Beaver Hollow
Trauma & Resilience Inc.
Climate Resilience Fund
Lakeshore Foundation
Glenn County Office of Education
Columbia Resilience
KLBRI
BasicNeeds US, Inc.
Vermont Climate and Health Alliance
CAN Climate Action Net
Climate Generation
Rising Communities (formerly Community Health Councils)
United Way of the Columbia Willamette
Truly Well
Resources for Resilience
Good Grief Network
Towson Therapy Group
Prevent Child Abuse New York

Family Focused Treatment Association
Resilience United
Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative
Committee for Children
Resilient Brunswick County
Inseparable
Afterschool Alliance
18th Street Arts Center
Indivisible ReSisters Walnut Creek
ecoAmerica
Post Carbon Institute
Futures Without Violence
Aloka Earth Room
Moms Clean Air Force
Finger Lakes Community Schools
350 Eugene
Climate Psychiatry Alliance
The Resilient Activist
Generation Up (GENup)
EcoInfluencer Academy
Trauma Informed Oregon
Climate Health Now
Generation Up (GENup)
RI International
Trauma-informed Hampshire County
Restore Hope

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility
RIMYA Services
Our Climate
Community Resilience Research
Susanne Moser Research & Consulting
MENTOR Youth Development
The Family Focused Treatment Association
The Center for Mind-Body Medicine
Triple P America - Positive Parenting Program
100% Chaves County Initiative
Full Circle Florida, Inc.
Schools for Climate Action
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
Safer Together
Classic City Mindful Movement
ACEs Matter, Corp
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
Youth and Women for Change in Eswatini
Future Focused Education
Resilient Colorado
Peace 'In It' Counseling
Futures Without Violence
Educational Sustainability Mobilization Inc.
SabaterLAB Foundation
Between the Waters
Participatory Research Consulting