June 8, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chairwoman, U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
154 Russell Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
217 Russell Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of the undersigned Mental Health Liaison Groups (MHLG) member organizations, we express our strong support for Senator Maggie Hassan’s (D-NH) and Joni Ernst’s (R-IA) bipartisan S.1543, the Suicide Training and Awareness Nationally Delivered for Universal Prevention (STANDUP) Act. Having passed successfully last year in the House, we are urging the Committee to immediately bring forward the legislation for consideration. This legislation will expand student suicide awareness and prevention training for grades six through twelve.

Since 2010, suicide has been the second-leading cause of death for young Americans ages 10-24. Particularly disturbing is the number of suicides of children aged 10-14, which has nearly tripled since 2007.\(^1\) From 2007 to 2015, the number of children and teens visiting the emergency room for suicide-related injuries doubled.\(^2\) In 2017, 517 Americans aged 10-14 and 6,252 aged 15-24 died by suicide.\(^3\) A study by Trust for America’s Health and Well Being Trust published in October 2019 found that adolescent suicide rates for young people ages 12-19 increased by 87% from 2007 to 2017.\(^4\)

COVID-19 has only exacerbated our youth mental health and suicide crisis. Mental Health America’s 2021 State of Mental Health Report showed youth ages 11-17 who accessed the screening were more likely than any other age group to score for moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression, and 77,470 youth reported experiencing frequent suicidal ideations, with over one third identifying as LGBTQ+.\(^5\)

As the youth suicide crisis has worsened over the past decade, certain communities have borne the brunt of this tragic escalation. Trust for America’s Health and Well Being Trust report that suicide rates among American Indian and Alaskan Native adolescents (ages 15-19) are 60% higher than the national average for all teenagers.\(^6\) 48% of LGBTQ+ adolescents report considering or attempting suicide.\(^7\) Suicide and suicidal behaviors for Black youth suicide are also rising; Black boys (ages 5 to 12 years old) are twice as likely to die by suicide as compared to their white peers.\(^8\)

Before suicides occur, there are often warning signs present. Research shows that 70% of those who die by suicide tell someone beforehand or give another warning sign.\(^9\) Given the high prevalence of warning signs, suicide awareness and prevention trainings may mitigate youth suicides. For example, a randomized control study found a 40% drop in suicide attempts in schools that implemented the Signs of Suicide Prevention Program.\(^10\) By educating and empowering students to recognize the signs of suicidal ideation in themselves and their peers, these trainings

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3. Ibid (1)
6. Ibid (5)
7. Ibid (5)
can help schools and adolescents within them identify at-risk individuals, connect them to care, and avert tragedy.

The STANDUP Act encourages more SEAs, TEAs, and LEAs to implement life-saving policies by conditioning the receipt of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) 520A discretionary grant Project AWARE on the grantee committing to create and implement student suicide awareness and prevention training policies within three years of award receipt. The legislation provides flexibility in implementing these policies while encouraging their broader adoption by setting minimum standards for the policies based on evidence-based standards. Additionally, in order to ensure grantees are adequately supported, SAMHSA is required to provide ongoing best practices, training, and technical assistance to local, state, or tribal education agencies implementing suicide awareness and prevention training policies.

We appreciate your commitment to keeping America’s youth safe and expanding the use of policies that are proven to save lives. We urge the Senate HELP Committee to act quickly on S.1543 and bring the bill forward for consideration.

Sincerely,

American Art Therapy Association
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association of Suicidology
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition
Education Development Center

Families USA
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International OCD Foundation
The Jewish Federations of North America
The Kennedy Forum
Mental Health America
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Development Disability Directors
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association for Children’s Behavioral Health
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Board for Certified Counselors
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Postpartum Support International
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium
RI International