

February 7, 2022

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
House Labor, HHS and Education Subcommittee on
Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Labor, HHS and Education Subcommittee on
Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Senate Labor, HHS and Education Subcommittee on
Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
House Labor, HHS and Education Subcommittee on
Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Pass an FY2022 appropriations bill that includes increased funding for mental health and substance use services

Dear Senators and Representatives:

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG)– a coalition of national organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and substance use providers, advocates and other stakeholders committed to strengthening Americans’ access to mental health and substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery care– thanks you for the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS) Subcommittee’s critical investments in both ongoing and new mental health and substance use programs. We write today to urge you and your colleagues to pass bipartisan legislation that would enact these investments into law as soon as possible.

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to negatively impact the mental wellbeing of Americans. Prior to COVID-19, the nation's overdose epidemic was already claiming too many lives across the country. The pandemic has only worsened these conditions, leading to increased incidences of anxiety, depression and higher rates of substance use. The CDC reported that for the first time, more than 100,000 people lost their lives to drug overdoses during a 12-month period ending in April 2021, a 28.5% increase from the same period the year before.¹

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, December 15). *Products - vital statistics rapid release - provisional drug overdose data*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

The United States is in the middle of a devastating national emergency in child and adolescent mental health as well, as evidenced by a recent U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory which indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the nation's youth mental health crisis.² According to the CDC, rates of suicide attempts and deaths among children have increased in the U.S. over the past decade, and suicide is now the eighth leading cause of death in children aged 5–11.³ A 2021 survey conducted by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing found that a majority of parents say their children's mental wellbeing worsened during the prolonged periods of remote learning and social isolation due to COVID-19.⁴ There is an ever-increasing need for mental health and substance use information, resources and support for families and schools. In October 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Children's Hospital Association declared a national emergency in children's mental health and wellbeing, noting the growing number of young people with soaring rates of depression, anxiety, trauma, loneliness, and suicidality that will have lasting impacts on them, their families, and their communities.⁵

We recognize that during the pandemic response, Congress has made unprecedented, bipartisan investments throughout the health care space. Late last year, the House and Senate Labor-HHS Subcommittees proposed and approved significant funding levels for mental health, substance use treatment, suicide prevention and recovery services. We write today to urge Congress to codify those funding levels into the final FY2022 annual appropriations package, providing the needed and long-term investments to transform how our country responds to people in need. A continuing resolution of any length threatens our ability to meet the growing demand for lifesaving mental health and substance use prevention, treatment and recovery services. We believe that our nation's ability to respond to mental health and substance use crises in the same way we respond to other medical emergencies – with prompt, effective, and culturally competent care – is essential to our collective wellbeing. As you continue your negotiations, we urge you and your colleagues to prioritize funding for critical mental health and substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery programs.

Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of our request. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please contact the chair of the MHLG Committee on Budget and Appropriations, David Koss with SMART Recovery at Koss1@comcast.net or the Chair of the MHLG, Laurel Stine with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention at LStine@AFSP.org.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom*

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Suicidology
American Counseling Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association

² Department of Health and Human Services. (2021, December 7). *Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory*. Retrieved from <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System. (2018, June 1). *Recent Increases in Injury Mortality Among Children and Adolescents Aged 10–19 Years in the United States: 1999–2016*. National Vital Statistics Reports. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr67/nvsr67_04.pdf

⁴ National Council for Mental Wellbeing. (2021, September 8). *National Council for Mental Wellbeing Poll Finds Youth Mental Health Worsened Dramatically Because of COVID-19 Pandemic*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/press-releases/national-council-for-mental-wellbeing-poll-finds-youth-mental-health-worsened-dramatically-because-of-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁵ American Academy of Pediatrics. (2021, October 19). *AAP-AACAP-CHA Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health*. Retrieved from <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/child-and-adolescent-healthy-mental-development/aap-aacap-cha-declaration-of-a-national-emergency-in-child-and-adolescent-mental-health/>

American Psychological Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Center for Law and Social Policy
Centerstone*
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Families USA*
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium
International OCD Foundation
Jed Foundation, The
The Jewish Federations of North America
The Kennedy Forum
Legal Action Center
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare
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 Pediatric Nurse Practitioners*
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Board for Certified Counselors
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Disability Rights Network
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National League for Nursing
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies*
REDC Consortium
RI International
Sandy Hook Promise
Schizophrenia & Psychosis Action Alliance
SMART Recovery
The Trevor Project
Trust for America's Health

**Denotes Affiliate Membership*