

September 7, 2022

The Honorable Robert Casey
United States Senate
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
United States Senate
520 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Casey and Cassidy,

Thank you for your leadership in introducing S. 4472, the Health Care Capacity for Pediatric Mental Health Act. In order to stem the crisis in children's mental health, we must ensure that federal programs are tailored to meet the unique needs of children and adolescents. This legislation makes long overdue investments in mental health and substance use disorder care for kids and teens while providing support to the pediatric health professionals who serve them across the continuum of care. These are timely and critical steps to improve children's ability to receive the right care, in the right setting and at the right time.

As champions of children's mental health, you know that the emergency they currently face did not just begin with COVID-19. A study in JAMA Pediatrics found significant increases in children being diagnosed with anxiety (27%) and depression (24%) between 2016-2020.¹ Within the same time period, children's hospitals experienced a steep rise in the number of emergency department and inpatient visits for suicidal thoughts or self-harm, with visits more than doubling.² Suicide rates among Black children have been on the rise, with Black children under age 12 twice as likely to die by suicide compared to white peers.³ While mental health symptoms and disorders in children are quite common with 1 in 5 children experiencing a mental health condition each year, too many children go without mental health care and often wait years between the onset of symptoms and beginning treatment.

The added challenges children and their parents and caregivers have faced as a result of COVID-19 have been immense. Experiences such as prolonged stress and uncertainty, disruption in their daily routines, social isolation, financial instability and, for too many families, grief over lost loved ones, have further strained the mental health of kids and teens. Recent reports have found that 200,000 children have lost parents or primary caregivers to COVID-19, with families of color disproportionately impacted.⁴ According to the CDC, in 2021, 4 in 10 teens reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and 1 in 5 reported that they have contemplated suicide, a notable increase from previous

¹ Lebrun-Harris LA, Ghandour RM, Kogan MD, Warren MD. [Five-Year Trends in US Children's Health and Well-being, 2016-2020](#). JAMA Pediatrics. March 14, 2022.

² Children's Hospital Association (CHA), analysis of CHA PHIS database, n=38 children's hospitals.

³ Wenner Moyer, Melinda. [Suicide Rates Rise in a Generation of Black Youth](#). Scientific American. Sept. 29, 2021.

⁴ Imperial College London, [COVID-19 Orphanhood: United States of America](#), April 5, 2022.

years.⁵ The impact of pandemic-related adversities children have faced will continue to take a toll in the years ahead. We must respond now to reduce widespread unmet mental health needs in children and prevent worsening outcomes for generations to come.

In order to address the national emergency in children's mental health, we must make urgently needed investments in pediatric mental health and substance use disorder treatment services, including both the pediatric mental health workforce and necessary infrastructure to deliver high-quality care to children at every level of need. The Health Care Capacity for Pediatric Behavioral Health Act takes important steps to prioritize well-coordinated and integrated systems of care that are prepared to deliver culturally competent, developmentally appropriate mental health care to children across a range of settings.

We strongly support S. 4472, the Health Care Capacity for Pediatric Behavioral Health Act, which:

- Supports community-based pediatric mental health services and innovative solutions to increase care coordination and integration.
- Invests in the pediatric mental health and addiction workforce through enhanced training.
- Expands our national capacity to provide care to children across the continuum of care, including for those who require inpatient treatment and step-down levels of care.

We thank you for your commitment to strengthening children's mental health by prioritizing federal investments which will improve children's access to mental and behavioral health services delivered by well-trained pediatric professionals. We look forward to working together to advance S. 4472, the Health Care Capacity for Pediatric Behavioral Health Act to ensure children can receive the support they need to cope with mental health conditions and grow into healthy adulthood.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

ACT Now for Mental Health

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Mental Health Counselors Association

American Occupational Therapy Association

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychological Association

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report: Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey, January – June 2021](#), April 1, 2022.

American Society of Addiction Medicine
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
Children's Hospital Association
Clinical Social Work Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
First Focus Campaign for Children
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
International OCD Foundation
The Jed Foundation
The Jewish Federations of North America
The Kennedy Forum
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Alliance on Mental Illness
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families
National League for Nursing
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies (NJHSA)
REDC Consortium
RI International
Sandy Hook Promise
Trust for America's Health