

June 29, 2023

The Honorable Lisa Blunt Rochester  
United States House of Representatives  
1724 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Brian Fitzpatrick  
United States House of Representatives  
271 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Fitzpatrick and Blunt Rochester,

Thank you for your leadership in introducing H.R. 2412, Helping Kids Cope Act. In order to stem the crisis in children's mental health, we must ensure that federal programs are designed to support the unique needs of children and adolescents, as well as the pediatric mental and behavioral health workforce. This legislation would improve children's access to a full spectrum of mental and behavioral health services when they need them, and in the appropriate setting to meet their specific needs.

The Mental Health Liaison Group is a membership organization comprised of national groups representing consumers, family members, mental health and substance use disorder providers, advocates, payers and other stakeholders, committed to strengthening Americans' access to mental health and substance use disorder care. We are proud to share our support for the Helping Kids Cope Act, which aims to expand the availability of a variety of pediatric mental health services, in communities across the country and makes long overdue targeted investments in the pediatric mental and behavioral health workforce, where significant shortages persist.

As champions for children's mental health, you know that 1 in 5 children and adolescents experience a mental health condition in a given year, and most go without treatment.<sup>1</sup> The added challenges children and their parents and caregivers have faced in recent years, including increased family stress, grief and social isolation, have taken a toll on children and teens' mental health. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2021, 29% of teens reported experiencing poor mental health, while 4 in 10 reported feeling persistent sadness or hopelessness - an increase across all racial and ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup> Findings were even more stark for teen girls, who were twice as likely as their male peers to report persistent sadness and hopelessness (59%) and were also more likely to consider, plan or attempt suicide.<sup>3</sup>

Trends related to suicide are particularly troubling, as 1 in 5 high school students contemplated suicide and 1 in 10 attempted suicide one or more times, in 2021.<sup>4</sup> Since 2019, children's hospitals have seen a 50% increase in emergency department visits related to suicide and self-injury and a 30 % increase inpatient stays. This trajectory

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<sup>1</sup> ["What is Children's Mental Health?,"](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2019

<sup>2</sup> ["Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report,"](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

predates the pandemic, with emergency department visits for suicide and self-injury more than tripling since 2016.<sup>5</sup>

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 Helping Kids Cope 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 H.R. 2412, the Helping Kids Cope Act, which:

- Supports community-based pediatric mental health services and innovative solutions to increase care coordination and integration and facilitate early intervention.
- Invests in the pediatric mental health and addiction workforce through enhanced training and recruitment and retention of pediatric providers.
- 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 H.R. 2412, Helping Kids Cope Act to ensure children can receive the support they need to cope with mental health conditions and grow into healthy adulthood.

Sincerely,

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Counseling Association  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Hospital Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychological Association Services  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Children's Hospital Association  
Clinical Social Work Association

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<sup>5</sup> CHA (2023). Mental Health Trends Report (Analysis of CHA PHIS data from 2016-2022). Unpublished report.

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Employee Assistance Professionals Association  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice  
Inseparable  
International OCD Foundation  
International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses  
The Kennedy Forum  
Mental Health America  
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare  
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 Council for Mental Wellbeing  
National Eating Disorders Association  
National Federation of Families  
National League for Nursing  
National Register of Health Service Psychologists  
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies  
Psychotherapy Action Network  
REDC Consortium  
RI International  
Sandy Hook Promise  
Trust for America's Health