

September 28, 2026

Senator Susan Collins
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Collins and Vice Chair Murray:

On behalf of the Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG), the largest coalition of national organizations representing individuals and families experiencing mental health and substance use challenges, mental health and substance use treatment providers, advocates, and other stakeholders committed to strengthening access to high-quality care, we write in strong support of the funding increase for Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education) grants included in the House's FY 2027 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, and to urge the Senate to match that funding level.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary and Trends Report, in 2025, 33% of high school students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and 14% seriously considered attempting suicide.¹ A 2024-2025 National Center for Education Statistics survey found that 53% of public schools reported an increase in students seeking mental health services compared to the prior year.² Yet only 52% of schools in that same survey felt able to effectively address all students' mental health needs, with 56% citing inadequate funding as a limiting factor.

Congress established Project AWARE to help address these challenges. The program is a school-based mental health grant initiative designed to promote youth mental health, increase access to mental health treatment, and improve mental health awareness among school personnel. Since awarding its first grants in 2014, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has funded programs in at least 40 states and Puerto Rico.³ From 2018-2024, Project AWARE grants supported 1,509 state and local

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2015–2025," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2026).

<https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/youth-health-in-focus/index.html>

² National Center for Education Statistics, "School Pulse Panel: Surveying high-priority, education-related topics," U.S. Department of Education (2024-2025)

<https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/spp/results.asp#mentalhealth-march25>.

³ Heinrich CJ, Colomer A, Hieronimus M. Minding the gap: Evidence, implementation and funding gaps in mental health services delivery for school-aged children. Child Youth Serv Rev. 2023 Jul;150:107023. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107023. Epub 2023 May 22. PMID: 37261333; PMCID: PMC10202463, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10202463/>.

policy changes to strengthen mental health programs, and 327,332 students were referred for services.⁴ More than 1.3 million mental health professionals, first responders, teachers, school staff, administrators, families, and community partners have participated in related training.⁵ In rural communities in particular, Project AWARE funding has helped sustain partnerships between schools and local mental health providers, including transportation support so students and families can attend mental health appointments.

Project AWARE has long enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress since its inception. Despite this support, funding for the program has remained flat for four consecutive fiscal years, even as students continue recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and face newer challenges such as rising social media and artificial intelligence (AI) use. The House's proposed FY 2027 bill provides \$151,052,000 for Project AWARE, an increase of \$11 million over the current level.

Given the critical role Project AWARE plays in strengthening the mental health and well-being of children in K-12 public schools nationwide, we respectfully request the Senate to match the House's funding increase in its FY 2027 appropriations bill.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to advance an FY 2027 appropriations bill that protects the mental health of our nation's children and youth.

Sincerely,

Active Minds

American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

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 (AABH)

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Children's Hospital Association

⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Project AWARE," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2023), [Project AWARE: School Campus Mental Health | SAMHSA](#).

⁵ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Project AWARE," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2023), [Project AWARE: School Campus Mental Health | SAMHSA](#).

Crisis Text Line
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
Inseparable
International OCD Foundation
Legal Action Center
Mental Health America
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability
Directors (NACBHDD)
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Council on Problem Gambling
National Eating Disorders Association
National League for Nursing
NHMH - No Health without Mental Health
Psychotherapy Action Network (PsiAN)
Recovery Innovations
REDC Consortium
Sandy Hook Promise
The American Counseling Association
The Jed Foundation
The Kennedy Forum
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
The Trevor Project
Trust for America's Health
Vibrant Emotional Health