

# Mental Health Liaison Group

September 11, 2017

The Honorable Grace F. Napolitano  
United States House of Representatives  
1610 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Katko  
United States House of Representatives  
1620 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Napolitano and Katko:

The undersigned national organizations are writing to express our strong support for the Mental Health in Schools Act (H.R. 2913). We share your vision of making comprehensive school-based mental health services for students available in communities across America. We agree that supporting mental health needs early in life is critical to academic, health, and economic success, and therefore, providing services through schools is imperative. The Mental Health in Schools Act (H.R. 2913) would advance a public health approach to mental health services both in schools and in the community, and has the potential to improve the quality of life for countless children while saving an estimated \$247 billion annually by investing in early intervention programs.

The legislation builds on the highly-effective Safe Schools/Healthy Students program, which strengthens partnerships between local education agencies and community programs including, but not limited to, local primary health, juvenile justice and child welfare entities. It provides funding to place on-site licensed mental health professionals in schools across the country to provide behavioral health services for students and their families at no charge, and it supports community mental health systems to better coordinate with school-based providers, to increase school attendance and improve academic outcomes.

According to the 2009 Institute of Medicine report on mental health prevention and promotion, 50 percent of individuals with a diagnosable mental health disorder will receive a diagnosis by age 14, 75 percent by age of 24, and most will begin experiencing symptoms years before that. Given these facts, programs that better connect health and education systems should be prioritized. The earlier we act, the more effectively we can mitigate or prevent the development of a mental disorder.

The legislation would also provide assistance to communities in order to create comprehensive, evidence-based, age and culture appropriate, trauma-informed services that incorporate strategies of positive behavioral interventions and supports in academic settings. About 70 percent of children in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental illness, according to the Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice. Comprehensive mental and behavioral health services in schools help to address children's behavioral issues from a clinical, as opposed to a disciplinary, approach. Treating kids who act out in school, whether it's frequent outbursts or one violent act of aggression, is seen as a longer-term solution that can lead to a more productive life. Mental health issues are preventable and treatable when children, youth and their families are able to obtain appropriate services and support.

The Mental Health in the Schools Act is a testament to this recognition and we are confident this legislation will help improve children's resilience and ability to succeed in life. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to pass this important legislation as soon as possible.

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers  
c/o Laurel Stine, JD, American Psychological Association at [lstine@apa.org](mailto:lstine@apa.org), Angela Kimball, National Alliance on Mental Illness at [akimball@nami.org](mailto:akimball@nami.org) and Debbie Plotnick, MSS, MLSP, Mental Health America at [dplotnick@mentalhealthamerica.net](mailto:dplotnick@mentalhealthamerica.net)

Sincerely,

American Art Therapy Association  
American Dance Therapy Association  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Association on Health and Disability  
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Orthopsychiatric Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities  
American Group Psychotherapy Association  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Clinical Social Work Association  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy and Action  
EMDR International Association  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice  
Mental Health America  
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Council for Behavioral Health  
National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Eating Disorders Association  
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
National League for Nursing  
Sandy Hook Promise  
School Social Work Association of America  
The Trevor Project