

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 9, 2025

The Honorable Linda McMahon  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon:

We are writing to you regarding the Department of Education (“Department”) cutting approximately \$1 billion in federal mental health grants to help schools hire more psychologists, counselors, and other mental health workers. This abrupt decision to cut critical funding that was enacted in to law under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act and annual appropriations acts and already planned to be used in states, communities, and schools is deeply troubling and not consistent with our intent of providing these funds to support the health and wellbeing of children across the nation. We are requesting more information on the Department of Education’s decision and the Department’s plan to re-envision and re-compete these mental health program funds.

There is currently a shortage of school-based mental health professionals in our country. National mental health organizations recommend a ratio of one school counselor and one school social worker for every 250 students, and a ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students. Unfortunately, across each profession, the national ratio is more than double the recommendation, with some states and school districts faring even worse. These critical shortages significantly undermine the availability of high-quality services to students and families, particularly in rural, underserved, and other hard-to-staff school districts.

Ninety percent of parents across the country agree that schools should provide mental health services through a school psychologist, school counselor, or school social worker to help their child feel safe and supported at school. Students are six times as likely to receive needed mental health care when it is provided at school, and the majority of youth who receive needed services do so at school. This includes prevention, early detection, and early intervention efforts, which are critical components of comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services and crisis prevention.

The *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act* made important strides in investing in our mental health professionals, providing \$500 million each to the only two existing grant programs focused on addressing the critical shortage of school mental health professionals and increasing access to vital school-based services from 2022-2026: the Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Program. Combined with

annual appropriations acts, funds for, these two competitive grants address the critical shortage of school-based mental health professionals in two distinct and essential ways: by increasing the available workforce, and by helping districts support increased positions to improve access to services. Given the unprecedented needs of our students, we must build on the work of this bipartisan legislation. However, on April 28, 2025, your Department made the decision to not continue future funding for approved grants for these two programs

Integrating mental health services in schools has helped both students and staff succeed by addressing issues such as bullying, self-esteem, and suicide while improving schools' capacity to identify, refer, and provide services to help students in need. School-based mental health professionals have improved staff retention, helped keep students in school, and promoted learning environments where students feel safe, supported, and ready to learn.

The Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant (MHSP) and the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant (SBMH) programs have proven to be extremely effective at addressing the root causes of shortages in school mental health professionals and increasing access to comprehensive school mental health services. The MHSP strengthens and expands the workforce pipeline by supporting innovative partnerships between institutions of higher education and high-needs school districts to train school mental health professionals. In just one cohort of grantees' first project year (from May to December 2023), MHSP funding supported:

- The training of 1,767 school mental health professionals;
- The placement of 1,191 graduate students in a supervised practicum/internship, immediately increasing services to students in high-need school districts; and
- The hiring of 133 school mental health providers in high-need school districts.

Building upon this work, the SBMH supports state and local education agencies in recruiting, hiring, and retaining school mental health professionals. In just one cohort of grantees' first year (also from May to December 2023), SBMH funding:

- Supported the hiring of 1,163 school mental health professionals;
- Supported the retention of 13,155 school mental health professionals; and
- Provided mental and behavioral health services to 774,385 students.

These data show the impact of just one cohort of the MHSP and SBMH grantees in the first nine months of their projects. Now is not the time to turn back. The uncertainty that is being created by the Department of Education is jeopardizing the work that has been done to increase comprehensive youth mental and behavioral health services, and the availability of school-based mental health professionals across the country.

With these concerns in mind, we respectfully request that the Department of Education provide answers to the following questions by Monday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025:

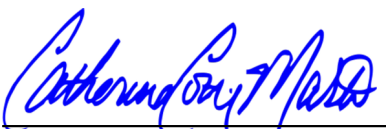
1. What is the Department's plan for addressing the youth mental health crisis?
2. Please describe the policies and procedures established for the review of grants under the MHSP and SBMH:
  - a. Please identify the offices and titles of staff involved in the review.

- b. How many employees involved in the review were onboarded at the Department on or after January 20, 2025? Please describe each of such employee's role in the review.
  - c. Please provide the total costs, including all personnel and non-personnel costs, of the review.
  - d. Please identify any other program currently undergoing or planned for the same or similar review and the associated timeline for each such review.
  - e. Please specifically identify each program undergoing a different review and explain each difference and the reason for each difference for such program.
  - f. Please provide the definition of the "best interest of the Federal Government" pursuant to 34 C.F.R. § 75.253(a)(5).
3. For each the MHSP and SBMH programs, please provide the following about all such grants not continued by the Department:
  - a. The total number of grants not continued by fiscal year of initial funding;
  - b. The standard or definition for each basis to not continue and evidence supporting the Department's basis for noncontinuation;
  - c. The total amount of funding expected under the approved future year budgets of discontinued grants on official documentation as of January 1, 2025 for each fiscal year;
  - d. The total amount of funding outlaid as of the date of response to this letter for each fiscal year; and
  - e. The total amount of funding deobligated by fiscal year as a result of the initial noncontinuation decision.
4. For each program that includes a grant not continued by the Department, please provide the following about all such terminated grants:
  - a. The total number of mental health professionals expected to participate in professional development activities;
  - b. The total number of new mental health professionals expected to be prepared; and
  - c. The total number of schools and students expected to benefit from any grant activities.
5. Please explain the policy and procedure for offering grantees the opportunity to clarify, explain or modify any element of their approved application prior to non-continuation. Please explain why an opportunity was not offered in each case.
6. Please explain the policy and procedure for offering grantees the opportunity to request reconsideration of the Department's decision to not continue these grants. When will reconsideration be reviewed, and when will grantees receive a decision on their reconsideration? How many staff are available to support timely and fair reconsideration?
7. Please describe how the Department will support grantees in completing their grant closeout responsibilities and identify resources available to support grantees.
8. Please provide a detailed plan and timeline on how the Department plans to re-envision and re-compete its mental health program funds to, as the Department alleges, "more effectively support students' behavioral health needs."

9. Please provide details on how the Department plans to increase comprehensive youth mental and behavioral health services, and the availability of school-based mental health professionals across the country.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator



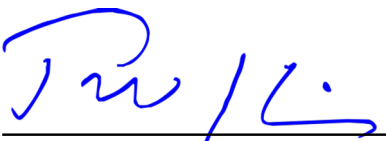
Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Lisa Blunt Rochester  
United States Senator



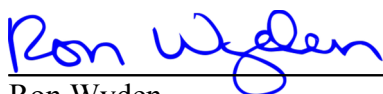
Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



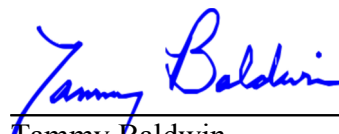
Ruben Gallego  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen  
U.S. Senator



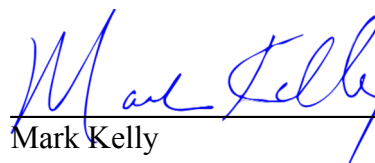
Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock  
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



Cory Booker  
United States Senator