

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 14, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chairwoman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Blunt:

As you develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 appropriations bill for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, we encourage you to help decrease the high student-to-mental health professional ratios in our nation's schools by addressing the shortage of school-based mental health professionals like school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers. We ask that you fund the Safe Schools National Activities Program at \$606 million dollars to allow for a new competition in two existing grant programs critical to addressing the shortage of school mental health professionals and increasing access to these vital school-based services. This funding level represents a \$500 million dollar increase over FY21 levels.

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) was previously authorized as a national discretionary grant program focused on drug, violence, and bullying prevention and school-based mental health services. For more than a decade, only the national programs have been funded. Now referred to as School Safety National Activities (SSNA), these funds are used for state and local school safety and violence prevention activities in grades K-12 and in institutions of higher education.

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, respectively. Unfortunately, across each profession, the national ratio is more than double the recommendation, with some states faring even worse. As a result, there has been an increase in bullying and suicide amongst our nation's students, and many have limited or no access to mental health services. The mental health and social-emotional needs of students have been increasingly highlighted amidst COVID-19

In both FY19 and FY20, Congress directed the Department of Education to set aside up to \$10 million to develop and implement a Mental Health Demonstration Grant to help improve the pipeline of school-based mental health providers to high-need school districts. Recognizing the increased need for school-based mental health services, in FY20, Congress provided an additional \$10 million for a new competition which would provide awards to SEAs, LEAs, or consortia of LEAs to increase the number of qualified, well-trained counselors, social workers, psychologists, or other mental health professionals that provide school-based mental health

services to students. Combined, these two competition 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. However, due to the critical needs of states and districts, increased federal funding for these two programs is vital.

We also urge the inclusion of report language, specifying the \$500 million dollar increase to the Safe Schools National Activities Program must be directed toward new competitions of the Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant Program and the School Based Mental Health Services Grant Program:

With the goal of addressing the shortage of school-based mental health professionals in our nation's K-12 schools by expanding the pipeline of these professionals and improving districts' ability to recruit and retrain these professionals, the Committee directs the Secretary to allocate \$250 million dollars for additional competitions of the Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant Program and \$250 million dollars for the School Based Mental Health Services Grant to increase the number of well-trained school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists, or other mental health professionals qualified to provide school-based mental health services.

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 the school's capacity to identify, refer, and provide services to help students in need. School-based mental health professionals have been proven to improve staff retention, help keep students in school, and promote learning environments where students feel safe, supported, and ready to learn.

In order to support the increased need for comprehensive mental and behavioral health services, and the availability of school-based mental health professionals, we must continue to provide robust federal investments to help high needs districts recruit and retain well-trained, highly qualified mental health professionals. For these reasons, we urge Congress to fund the Safe Schools National Activities Program at \$606 million, with \$500 million specifically provided for new competitions in these critical grant programs.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you to make sure students in every community are supported to reach their maximum potential.

Sincerely,



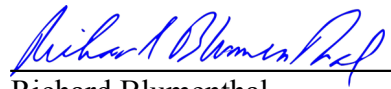
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United States Senator



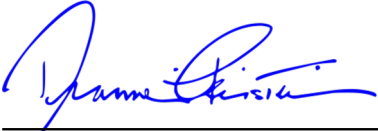
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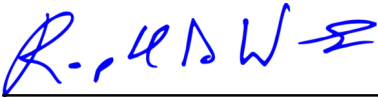
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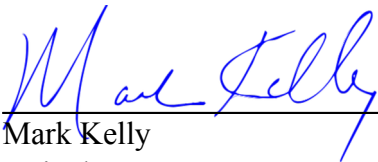
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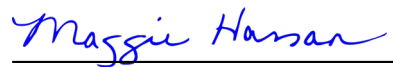
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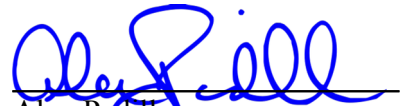
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