

March 22, 2023

The Honorable Robert Aderholt  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and  
Human Services, and Education  
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and  
Human Services, and Education  
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, and Education  
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Shelley Capito  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and  
Human Services, and Education  
Senate Appropriations Committee

Re: Addressing the Shortages of School Mental Health Professionals in FY2024

Dear Chairman Aderholt, Chairwoman Baldwin, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Ranking Member Capito:

As you develop the FY2024 appropriations bill for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, the undersigned national, state, and local organizations encourage you to address the severe shortages of school-based mental health professionals (e.g. school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers) by providing robust investments in 3 critical grant programs.

We request \$428M to be divided between the School-Based Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program. Both programs are funded via Safe Schools National Activities within the Department of Education, and this level of investment will allow for new grant awards to support LEA and SEA efforts to address workforce shortages and increase access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services. We also request \$300M for IDEA Part D, Section 662 (Personnel Preparation) which can be used to prepare school psychologists and other specialized instructional support personnel, early interventionists, and others to support the academic success, mental and behavioral health, and overall well-being of children and youth with disabilities. Collectively, these investments will help address the significant and pervasive workforce shortages and support increased access to comprehensive mental and behavioral health services necessary to support student wellbeing and improve student learning.

Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health service delivery systems promote wellness, resiliency, motivation and engagement, skill-building, and self-advocacy skills. School mental and behavioral health professionals partner with parents and families to support students' wellbeing at school, at home, and in life and adequate access to school-employed mental health professionals improves delivery and integration of school-wide programming to foster positive school climate, prevent violence, and balance physical and psychological safety. Without a highly qualified workforce of school-employed mental health professionals, schools lack the capacity to provide comprehensive social and emotional learning and mental, behavioral, and academic interventions and supports. These services are more important than ever as our country continues to experience a youth mental health crisis, which the US Surgeon General has referred to as a public health crisis. Approximately 40 percent of children will experience a mental health concern by 7th grade and each year, one in five students will experience a mental and behavioral health concern that rises to the level of a clinical diagnosis. Rather than addressing mental health needs when they arise to the level of a crisis, which is evidenced in the surge of pediatric emergency room visits and hospitalizations related to mental health concerns, a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention is needed.

Schools play an important role in these efforts. Although most students who need mental health services do

not receive them, of those that do, the vast majority access care at school. Importantly, students are much more likely to seek mental health support if it is available at school, and school mental health professionals bridge communication and access to services between families, schools, and community resources. It is imperative that we increase access to school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, and other qualified professionals so that students have access to a full range of mental and behavioral health services and have support in accessing any community-based care they may require.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a ratio of one school psychologist per 500 students to ensure access to comprehensive services and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) both recommend a ratio of 1:250; however, national ratios for all professions are more than double what is recommended. Our students deserve better. Districts have engaged in intentional efforts to expand access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services, however, these plans are hampered, and in some cases halted all together, due to the critical shortages of these and other qualified school mental health professionals.

Pervasive workforce shortages result in little, if any, mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention services and leaves many students without any access to mental and behavioral health care in the school setting. For many students, especially those in under-resourced and rural areas, schools are *the only* available source of mental and behavioral health care and workforce shortages leave them with no access to critical care. To solve this problem, we must address the workforce pipeline by increasing the availability and affordability of graduate education opportunities, including through Grow Your Own programs; facilitating partnerships between institutions of higher education (IHE) and high needs LEAs; and helping State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) build the capacity to recruit, train, and retain a robust workforce of school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers.

There is strong bi-partisan support for federal investment to adequately address the mental health workforce shortages and increase LEA and SEA capacity to provide comprehensive school mental health services to all students by implementing strategies based on their unique needs. We urge you to help address the youth mental health crisis and improve access to supports for students, including those specialized services for student with disabilities by providing \$428M for to be divided between the School-Based Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program and \$300M for IDEA Part D, Section 662 (Personnel Preparation). 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,

### **National Organizations**

AASA, The School Superintendents Association  
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Federation of Teachers  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Music Therapy Association  
American Psychological Association  
American School Counselor Association  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA)  
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Center for Learner Equity  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Colorado Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) Services  
Committee for Children  
Common Sense Media  
Council for Exceptional Children  
Council of Administrators of Special Education  
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, & Action  
EDGE Consulting Partners  
Education Reform Now  
GLSEN  
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE)  
Inseparable  
International OCD Foundation  
International Society for Psychiatric Mental Health Nurses  
Learning Disabilities Association of America  
Mental Health America  
MENTOR  
NASSP  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of School Nurses  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Education Association  
National League for Nursing  
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies  
REDC Consortium  
RI International  
Sandy Hook Promise  
School-Based Health Alliance  
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children (TED)  
The American Counseling Association  
The Education Trust  
The Jed Foundation

### **State Organizations**

Arizona Association of School Psychologists  
Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania  
California Association of School Psychologists  
Colorado Society of School Psychologists  
Connecticut Association of School Psychologists

Delaware Association of School Psychologists  
Florida School Counselor Association  
Georgia Association of School Psychologists (GASP)  
Hawaii Association of School Psychologists  
Idaho School Counselor Association  
Illinois School Counselor Association  
Illinois School Psychologist Association (ISPA)  
Indiana Association of School Psychologists  
Iowa School Psychologists Association  
Kansas Association of School Psychologists  
Lone Star State School Counselor Association  
Maine Association of School Psychologists  
Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives  
Massachusetts School Psychologists Association  
Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators  
Michigan Association of School Psychologists  
Minnesota School Psychologists Association  
Missouri Association of School Psychologists (MASP)  
Missouri School Counselor Association  
Montana Association of School Psychologists  
Montana School Counselor Association  
Nebraska School Psychologists Association  
New Jersey Association of School Psychologists  
New Mexico Regional Educational Cooperatives Association  
New York Association of School Psychologists  
North Carolina School Counselor Association  
North Carolina School Psychology Association  
North Dakota Association of School Psychologists  
North Dakota School Counselor Association  
Ohio Inter-University Council (IUC)  
Oklahoma School Psychological Association  
Oregon School Psychologists Association  
Pennsylvania School Counselors Association  
Rhode Island School Psychologists Association  
Tennessee School Counselor Association  
Texas Association of School Psychologists  
Utah Association of School Psychologists  
West Virginia School Psychologists Association

### **Local Organizations**

Bi-County Collaborative  
CAPS Collaborative  
Columbus City Schools  
Educators for Excellence

LABBB Collaborative

Los Angeles Unified School District

Northshore Education Consortium

San Diego Unified School District

Sheyenne Valley Special Education Unit

Shore Educational Collaborative