

August 6, 2019

The Honorable Pat Roberts, Chair
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Committee
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Ranking
Member
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Committee
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow,

Thank you for your bipartisan work toward developing a pathway for Child Nutrition Reauthorization this Congress as child nutrition programs play critical roles in the development of our nation's children and adolescents. On behalf of the below national, state, and local organizations, we encourage the Committee to consider including eating disorders prevention within the Local School Wellness Policies as found in Section 4 of the bipartisan Long-term Investments in Education for Wellness (LIVE Well) Act (H.R. 2625), as another vital component toward fostering the mental and physical well-being of children within schools.

Since the creation of Local School Wellness Policies within the WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (Sec. 204 of P.L. 108-265), many schools have focused on obesity prevention programming without considering any adverse effects on children at-risk of or who experience eating disorders. Studies show high rates of students meeting the criteria for eating disorder risk or warranting clinical referral (58% of reported overweight/obese students, 34% of reported normal weight students, and 25% of reported underweight students).¹ Further, research demonstrates that a focus on appearance and weight can promote disordered eating behaviors, contribute to body dissatisfaction, dieting, low self-esteem, and reliably predict greater weight gain over time.²

Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses affecting 30 million Americans during their lifetime. The eating disorders are complex, biologically based illnesses and have a high mortality rate amongst psychiatric illnesses, only second to opioids. While eating disorders can be successfully treated, 75 percent of adolescents with anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa and 90 percent of those with binge eating disorder never receive treatment.³ Compounding the severity of eating disorders, individuals typically have co-occurring mental health diagnoses including, depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Left undiagnosed and untreated, eating disorders can lead and amplify to co-occurring mental and physical conditions such as Type II diabetes, cardiac disability, hepatitis, cognitive dysfunction, kidney failure, osteoporosis, fractures, infertility, gall bladder disease, esophageal cancer, decalcification of teeth, high/low blood pressure, and inflammation of the esophagus.⁴⁵ Further, the suicide rate for individuals with eating disorder is 23 percent higher than the rate for the general population.⁶

¹ Kass, A. E., Jones, M., Kolko, R. P., Altman, M., Fitzsimmons-Craft, E. E., Eichen, D. M., ... Wilfley, D. E. (2017). Universal prevention efforts should address eating disorder pathology across the weight spectrum: Implications for screening and intervention on college campuses. *Eating Behaviors*, 25, 74-80. doi: 10.1016/j.eatbeh.2016.03.019

² Danielsdottir, S., Burgard, D., & Oliver-Pyatt, W. Guidelines for Childhood Obesity Prevention Programs. Retrieved from <https://www.aedweb.org/advocate/press-releases/position-statements/guidelines-childhood-obesity>

³ Swanson SA, Crow SJ, Le Grange D, Swendsen J, Merikangas KR. Prevalence and correlates of eating disorders in adolescents. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 2011; 68(7):714-723.

⁴ Westmoreland, P., Krantz, M. J., & Mehler, P. S. (2016). Medical complications of anorexia nervosa and bulimia. *Am J Med*, 129(1), 30-37.

⁵ Thornton, L. M., Watson, H. J., Jangmo, A., Welch, E., Wiklund, C., von Hauswolff-Juhlin, Y., . . . Bulik, C. M. (2017). Binge-eating disorder in the Swedish national registers: somatic comorbidity. *Int J Eat Disord*, 50(1), 58-65.

⁶ Harris, E.C. & Barraclough, B. (1997). Suicide as an outcome for mental disorders: a meta-analysis. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 170(3), 205-228.

To protect youth at-risk for or who experience an eating disorder, schools should balance their approach to student wellness and include eating disorders prevention within their existing Local School Wellness Policies.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness	
American Academy of Pediatrics, Florida Chapter	
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work	
American Art Therapy Association	
American Dance Therapy Association	
American Group Psychotherapy Association	
American Psychological Association	
Anxiety and Depression Association of America	
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare	
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness	
Balance Nutrition Counseling, PLLC	Nashville, Tennessee
B. Wheeler Nutrition, LLC	Sandy Springs, Georgia
Carolyn Felton Nutrition Therapy	Raleigh, North Carolina
Clinical Social Work Association	
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies (CIPS)	
Doorways, LLC	Phoenix, Arizona
International Federation of Eating Disorders Dietitians	
Mental Health America	
Emily Braaten, MS, RD, LD	Washington, DC
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, & Action	
E.L.M. Wellness	Raleigh, North Carolina
Elyse Resch, MS, RDN, CEDRD, FAND	Beverly Hills, California
Embody Therapy	Oak Park, Illinois
Fearless With Food, LLC	Portland, Oregon
Mental Health Council of Arkansas	
Michigan Eating Disorders Alliance	
Minnesota Women's Consortium	St. Paul, Minnesota
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health	
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors	
National Association for Rural Mental Health	
National Association of Social Workers	
National Council for Behavioral Health	
National Eating Disorders Association	
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health	
National PTA	
Nourish, LLC	Houston, Texas
Nutrition Counseling For Intuitive Eating	Towson, Maryland
Ruby Health and Wellness	Bend, Oregon
S-Ganginis, LLC	Ellicott City, Maryland
Sandy Hook Promise	
School-Based Health Alliance	
School Social Work Association of America	
Spectrum Psychology and Wellness, LLC	Gilbert, Arizona

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education
South Arkansas Regional Health Center

TASH

The Global Alliance for Behavioral Science and Social Justice

The Kennedy Forum

University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, Eating Disorders Program

With Milk and Honey, LLC

Women's Healing Center

Bloomington, Minnesota
El Dorado, Arkansas

Iowa City, Iowa
Oxford, Mississippi
Ellicott City, Maryland