

June 2, 2025

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 Shelley Moore Capito
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, and Education
Senate Appropriations Committee

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

Re: Developing the School-Based Mental Health Professionals Workforce in FY 2026

Dear Chairman Aderholt, Chairwoman Moore Capito, and Ranking Members DeLauro and Baldwin:

As you develop the FY 2026 appropriations bill for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, the 143 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 two critical workforce development grant programs. We request \$250 million to be divided between the **Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant** (MHSP) and the **School-Based Mental Health Services Grant** (SBMH) programs—without cutting investments in other education and mental health programs. Both programs are funded via Safe Schools National Activities within the Department of Education, and this level of investment will provide continuation funds for ongoing projects and allow for new grant awards.

Workforce development of school mental health professions continues to be in high demand in communities across the country due to pervasive workforce shortages. Shortages result in schools having limited, if any, capacity to promote mental and behavioral health and well-being, implement critical prevention and early intervention services, or provide students access to needed mental and behavioral health care. For many students, especially those in under-resourced and rural areas, schools are *the only* available source of mental and behavioral health care, and the shortage of school mental health professionals leaves them and their families with no access to critical care. Even among those who pursue additional services outside of school, most students and families initially receive support in the school building.

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' well-being at school, at home, and in life, and adequate access to school 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 and fully prepared workforce of school mental health professionals,

schools lack the capacity to provide comprehensive mental health promotion, prevention, early intervention, and other direct services, as well as important academic interventions and supports.

These services are more important than ever as our country continues to experience a youth mental health crisis. Approximately 40% 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 by 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 a vital role in these efforts. Although most of the students who need mental health services do not receive them, of those that do, the vast majority receive care at school. Notably, students are six times more likely to access mental health support if it is available at school. Even for those who go on to receive care outside of school, school mental health professionals serve as a bridge connecting students, families, educators, and community resources.

Districts have engaged in intentional efforts to expand access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services, but these plans are hampered, and in some cases halted altogether, by the critical shortages of these and other qualified school-based mental health professionals. 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) each recommend a ratio of 1:250, respectively. However, current national ratios for each profession are well above what is recommended.

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.

To solve this problem, we must expand and strengthen the school mental health professional 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 and high needs local education agencies (LEAs); and helping state education agencies (SEAs) and LEAs experiencing shortages build the capacity to recruit, hire, and retain an adequate workforce of school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers. Continued investment in the MHSP and SBMH programs, which were authorized in 2022, will do just that.

The MHSP supports innovative partnerships between graduate programs and school districts to train school-based mental health providers, strengthening and expanding the workforce pipeline. In just one cohort of grantees' first year (from May to December of 2023), MHSP investments supported:

- The training of 1,767 school mental health professionals;
- The placement of 1,191 graduate students in practicum/internship; and
- The hiring of 133 school mental health providers in high-needs LEAs.

The SBMH supports SEAs and LEAs in recruiting, hiring, and retaining school-based mental health providers, as well as retraining and re-specialization efforts. In just one cohort of grantees' first year (from May to December of 2023), SBMH investments:

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

The data clearly support the positive impact these grants have on creatively and effectively addressing workforce shortages and increasing the number of students who receive school mental and behavioral health services. Fully developing the school mental health workforce *requires long-term effort and sustained investment*. Given the unprecedented needs of our students, Congress must continue to support efforts to develop the school mental and behavioral health workforce and increase access to comprehensive services.

In FY 2026, we urge you to provide \$250 million to be divided between the MHSP and SBMH grants, which are the *only* two federal grants solely focused on developing the school mental health workforce. Demand for this funding remains high, and the Department of Education has only been able to award approximately 50% of eligible applicants each grant competition cycle. There is strong bipartisan support for these federal investments, and, most importantly, this funding is greatly needed to help increase schools' and communities' capacity to provide comprehensive mental and behavioral health services to all students.

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

Sincerely,

National Association of School Psychologists
American Psychological Association
American School Counselor Association
School Social Work Association of America
AASA, The School Superintendents Association
Active Minds
AFT: Education, Healthcare, Public Services
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Counseling Association
American Federation of School Administrators
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association of School Business Officials International
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
Collaborative Family Healthcare Association
Committee for Children
Council for Exceptional Children, Division of Research
Council of Administrators of Special Education

Crisis Text Line
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, and Action
Education Reform Now
edWeb.net
Epilepsy Foundation of America
Families USA
Futures Without Violence
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
Inseparable
International OCD Foundation
International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of Social Workers
National Board for Certified Counselors
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Federation of Families
National League for Nursing
National PTA
National Youth Leadership Council
Nemours Children's Health
Psychotherapy Action Network
REDC Consortium
Sandy Hook Promise
School-Based Health Alliance
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
The Jed Foundation
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health/Got Transition
Western Youth Services
Alabama Association of School Psychologists
Alaska School Psychologists Association
All American Athlete
Arizona Association of School Psychologists
Arizona PTA
Arkansas School Counselor Association
Arkansas School Psychology Association
Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania
California Association of School Psychology
Colorado BOCES Association
Colorado School Counselor Association
Connecticut Association of School Psychologists
Connecticut School Counselor Association
Delaware Association of School Psychologists
Florida Association of School Psychologists

Florida School Counselor Association, Inc
Georgia Association of School Psychologists
Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists
Hawaii School Counselor Association
Idaho School Counselor Association
Idaho School Psychologists Association
Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education
Illinois School Counselor Association
Illinois School Psychologist Association
Indiana Association of School Psychologists
Indiana School Counselor Association
Iowa School Psychologists Association
Kansas Association of School Psychologists
Kentucky Association for Psychology in Schools
Kentucky School Counselor Association
Louisiana School Psychological Association
Maine Association of School Psychologists
Maryland School Psychologists' Association
Massachusetts School Counselors Association
Massachusetts School Psychologists Association
Michigan Association of School Psychologists
Minnesota School Counselor Association
Minnesota School Psychologist Association
Mississippi Association for Psychology in the Schools
Missouri Association of School Psychologists
Missouri PTA
Missouri School Counselor Association
Montana Association of School Psychologists
Montana School Counselor Association
Nebraska School Psychologist Association
Nevada Association of School Psychologists
New Hampshire School Counselor Association
New Jersey Association of School Psychologists
New Mexico Association of School Psychologists
New York Association of School Psychologists
New York State School Counselor Association
North Carolina School Counselor Association
North Dakota Association of School Psychologists
Ohio School Counselor Association
Ohio School Psychologists Association
Oklahoma School Counselor Association
Oklahoma School Psychological Association
Oregon PTA
Oregon School Counseling Association
Oregon School Psychologists Association
Pennsylvania School Counselors Association
Puerto Rico School Psychology Association

Rhode Island School Counselor Association
Rhode Island School Psychologists Association
School Nurse Organization of Washington
South Carolina Association of School Psychologists
South Dakota Association of School Psychologists
Tennessee Association of School Psychologists
Texas Association of School Psychologists
Utah Association of School Psychologists
Vermont Association of School Psychologists
Virginia Academy of School Psychologists
Virginia School Counselor Association
Washington Association of School Social Workers
Washington School Counselor Association
Washington State Association of School Psychologists
West Virginia School Psychologists Association
Wisconsin School Psychologists Association
Wyoming School Psychology Association
Atholton Elementary School PTA
Cabinet Mountain Cooperative
Child Advocates of South Florida
Issaquah PTSA Council Board
Los Angeles Unified School District
North Country Matters
Noxon Public Schools
Poplar Bridge PTA
Thompson Falls School District
Troy Public Schools
United States Virgin Islands School Counselors Association