

November 29, 2022

The Honorable Robert Casey  
United States Senate  
393 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Portman  
United States Senate  
448 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Casey and Portman,

Thank you for your leadership in introducing S. 4747, the Investing in Kids' Mental Health Now Act. In order to stem the [national emergency](#) in child and adolescent mental health, we must ensure children can get the care they need and that requires direct, targeted investment in pediatric mental health services. This legislation will incentivize states to increase Medicaid reimbursement for pediatric mental health and substance use disorder treatment services, providing direct support to the pediatric behavioral health workforce and improving access to children's mental health care.

Medicaid is the single largest payer of children's mental health services in the United States yet states often struggle to maintain an adequate network due to lower reimbursement rates for pediatric mental and behavioral services and an ongoing shortage of pediatric mental health professionals. These longstanding issues translate to delayed access to mental health care for children covered by Medicaid across the country. Direct Medicaid investment in children's mental health services is needed to support the current workforce and incentivize professionals to participate in the Medicaid program.

As champions of children's mental health, you know that the crisis they currently face did not just begin with the pandemic. A study in JAMA Pediatrics found significant increases in children being diagnosed with anxiety (27%) and depression (24%) between 2016-2020.<sup>1</sup> Within the same time period, children's hospitals experienced a steep rise in the number of emergency department and inpatient visits for suicidal thoughts or self-harm, with visits more than doubling.<sup>2</sup> Suicide rates among Black children are rising, with Black children under age 12 twice as likely to die by suicide compared to white peers.<sup>3</sup> While mental health symptoms and disorders in children are quite common with 1 in 5 children experiencing a mental health condition each year, too many children go without mental health care and often wait years between the onset of symptoms and beginning treatment.

The impact of the adversities children faced as a result of the pandemic, including social isolation, family strain and grief, have taken a toll on children's mental health. According to the CDC, in 2021, 4 in 10 teens reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and 1 in 5

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<sup>1</sup> Lebrun-Harris LA, Ghandour RM, Kogan MD, Warren MD. [Five-Year Trends in US Children's Health and Well-being, 2016-2020](#). JAMA Pediatrics. March 14, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Children's Hospital Association (CHA), analysis of CHA PHIS database, n=38 children's hospitals.

<sup>3</sup> Wenner Moyer, Melinda. [Suicide Rates Rise in a Generation of Black Youth](#). Scientific American. Sept. 29, 2021.

reported that they have contemplated suicide, a worrying increase from previous years.<sup>4</sup> Children's hospitals continue to report higher numbers of children presenting in mental health crisis at emergency departments and too many children and teens are stuck boarding while they wait for placements to become available in appropriate settings. Without meaningful intervention we will continue to see troubling trends and delayed treatment for children and teens in the years ahead.

In order to reduce widespread unmet mental health needs in children, investments in pediatric mental health and substance use disorder treatment services are urgently needed. We strongly support S. 4747, the Investing in Kids' Mental Health Now Act, which:

- Incentivizes states to increase reimbursement for pediatric mental health services with an increased federal match, targeting support directly to providers enrolled in Medicaid.
- Guides states toward best practices for improving access to a full continuum of mental, emotional and behavioral health services for children covered by Medicaid, including best practices for provider recruitment and retention, and improving access in underserved communities and for children with complex medical needs.
- Identifies regulatory and legal barriers which inhibit providers' ability to increase care capacity and promote existing flexibilities states might use, including through telehealth, to expand pediatric mental health service availability.

We thank you for your commitment to strengthening children's mental health by prioritizing Medicaid investments which will encourage and assist states in expanding children's access to mental and behavioral health services. We look forward to working together to advance S. 4747, the Investing in Kids' Mental Health Now Act, and will continue to urge Congress to enact it before the end of this year.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

America's Essential Hospitals

American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychological Association

Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)

Association of Children's Residential & Community services (ACRC)

Catholic Health Association of the United States

Children's Hospital Association

CLASP, The Center for Law and Social Policy

Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action

Family Voices

Federation of American Hospitals

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<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [Morbidity and Mortality Week Report: Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey, January – June 2021](#), April 1, 2022.

The Jed Foundation (JED)  
The Jewish Federations of North America  
Mental Health America  
MomsRising  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
National Association for Behavioral Healthcare  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Children's Alliance  
National Council for Mental Wellbeing  
National League for Nursing  
Nemours Children's Health  
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies  
REDC Consortium  
School Social Work Association of America  
School-Based Health Alliance  
Vizient, Inc.