August 12, 2017

The Honorable Grace F. Napolitano The Honorable John Katko

United States House of Representatives United States House of Representatives 1610 Longworth House Office Building 1620 Longworth House Office Building Washington, DC 20515 Washington, DC 201515

Dear Representatives Napolitano and Katko:

The undersigned national organizations are writing to express our strong support for the Mental Health in Schools Act (H.R. 2913). We share your vision of making comprehensive school-based mental health services for students available in communities across America. We agree that supporting mental health needs early in life is critical to academic, health, and economic success, and therefore, providing services through schools is imperative.

The Mental Health in Schools Act (H.R. 2913) would advance a public health approach to mental health services both in schools and in the community, and has the potential to improve the quality of life for countless children while saving an estimated $247 billion annually by investing in early intervention programs. The legislation builds on the highly-effective Safe Schools/Healthy Students program, which strengthens partnerships between local education agencies and community programs including, but not limited to, local primary health, juvenile justice and child welfare entities. It provides funding to place on-site licensed mental health professionals in schools across the country to provide behavioral health services for students and their families at no charge, and it supports community mental health systems to better coordinate with school-based providers, to increase school attendance and improve academic outcomes.

According to the 2009 Institute of Medicine report on mental health prevention and promotion, 50 percent of individuals with a diagnosable mental health disorder will receive a diagnosis by age 14, 75 percent by age of 24, and most will begin experiencing symptoms years before that. Given these facts, programs that better connect health and education systems should be prioritized. The earlier we act, the more effectively we can mitigate or prevent the development of a mental disorder.

The legislation would also provide assistance to communities in order to create comprehensive, evidence-based, age and culture appropriate, trauma-informed services that incorporate strategies of positive behavioral interventions and supports in academic settings. About 70 percent of children in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental illness, according to the Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice. Comprehensive mental and behavioral health services in schools help to address children's behavioral issues from a clinical, as opposed to a disciplinary, approach. Treating kids who act out in school, whether it's frequent outbursts or one violent act of aggression, is seen as a longer-term solution that can lead to a more productive life. Mental health issues are preventable and treatable when children, youth and their families are able to obtain appropriate services and support.

The Mental Health in the Schools Act is a testament to this recognition and we are confident this legislation will help improve children’s resilience and ability to succeed in life. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to pass this important legislation as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

(MHLG signers from 2015)

American Dance Therapy Association

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychological Association

American Association on Health and Disability

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Occupational Therapy Association

American Orthopsychiatric Association

American Mental Health Counselors Association

Alliance for Strong Families and Communities

American Group Psychotherapy Association

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Clinical Social Work Association

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy and Action

Mental Health America

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

National Association for Rural Mental Health

National Association of School Psychologists

National Association of State Directors of Special Education

National Association for Children's Behavioral Health

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Council for Behavioral Health

National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health

National Disability Rights Network

National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health

National League for Nursing

School Social Work Association of America

The Trevor Project