June 23, 2022

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader, United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader, United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chris Murphy
United States Senate
136 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Cornyn
United States Senate
517 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, and Senators Murphy and Cornyn,

As the Senate looks to bring forth the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act following the May 24, 2022, tragedy at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas, we, the 100 leading national experts on mental health, educators, and school leaders express our support for this multifaceted approach that addresses gun violence and continue to urge against publicly conflating gun violence perpetrators with people who have mental health conditions. As organizations representing front-line and school mental health professionals, individuals and families affected by mental health conditions, and those who support our students, we see how complex the gun violence crisis is. It is critical that public health and political messaging not further stigmatize individuals with mental illness in relation to mass shootings, as this will continue to deter Americans from seeking needed mental health treatment.

The Bipartisan Safer Communities package includes necessary firearm safety provisions as well as over $2 billion for school climate, including mental health professionals, up to $8 billion for Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers (CCBHCs), and up to $5 billion for broader mental health programs. The Senate has a once-in-a-decade opportunity to pass meaningful bipartisan violence prevention legislation, and we are excited to work alongside you to make this a reality.

The tragedy in Uvalde highlights the immediate need for evidence-based legislative solutions for gun violence prevention in America. Tragically, 51% of suicides in the U.S. are completed by means of firearms.¹ This is true particularly for veterans, service members, and military family members, for whom firearms are the method of suicide 69%, 62.6%, and 52.7% of the time, respectively.² The COVID-19 pandemic has additionally worsened the mental health of Americans, with youth experiencing the steepest declines in mental health. Among adolescents aged 13-18, overdoses have jumped 119%, intentional self-harm has doubled, and children’s hospitals have reported a 45% increase in cases of self-injury and

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suicide.\textsuperscript{3,4,5} Furthermore, gun violence causes significant trauma among survivors and affected communities, resulting in psychological disorders such as depression and post-traumatic stress.

While we face a mental health crisis that needs to be addressed, it is critical that policymakers not conflate mental illness with gun violence. Messages like these build on existing fear, discrimination, and stigma against individuals with mental illness and are extremely harmful. People experiencing mental health conditions are no more likely to engage in firearm violence compared to the average person, and are indeed more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators.\textsuperscript{6,7} Claims that mental illness is a predictor of gun violence additionally discourage individuals at high risk of suicide or self-harm from seeking life-saving mental health treatment.\textsuperscript{8}

Firearms are now the leading cause of death for children and adolescents in the United States.\textsuperscript{9} That is why we urge the Senate to take up this multifaceted package to address this challenge. As national experts and advocates coming together as a coalition, we are grateful for the thoughtful, bipartisan efforts in response to the many tragedies our country has experienced including the recent tragedy at Robb Elementary in Uvalde. The Bipartisan Safer Communities package includes necessary provisions and investments, including in crisis intervention programs, drug and mental health courts, state implementation of extreme risk protection orders, further clarification of case law on dealers, and expansion of protections for dating partners. Additionally, the package dramatically expands investments in our nation’s mental health system, including over $2 billion for school mental health professionals and school climate, up to $8 billion for CCBHCs, and up to $5 billion for broader mental health programs like Project AWARE, 9-8-8, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, and the Community Mental Health Block Grant, which received $250 million over four years to provide states, DC, and territories with flexible funding for comprehensive community mental health services. All these evidence-based investments are necessary to avert preventable tragedies in the weeks, months, and years to come. We urge the Senate to swiftly pass this legislation.

Sincerely,

Sandy Hook Promise

AASA, The Superintendents Association

2020 Mom

Alabama – Alsana

\textsuperscript{3} FAIR Health. (March 2, 2021). \textit{The Impact of COVID-19 on Pediatric Mental Health: A Study of Private Healthcare Claims.}


\textsuperscript{5} Children’s Hospital Association, September 2021, \url{https://www.childrenshospitals.org/-/media/Files/CHA/Main/Issues_and_Advocacy/Key_Issues/Mental-Health/2021/covid_and_childrens_mental_health_factsheet_091721.pdf?la=en&hash=F201013848F9B9C97FAE16A89B01A38547C7C5C7}


\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.

Alabama – Lakeshore Foundation
American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association on Health and Disability
American Counseling Association
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA)
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Mental Health Counselors
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
American School Counselor Association
American Therapeutic Recreation Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Association of Educational Service Agencies
California – Alsana
California – The Renfrew Center
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Clinical Social Work Association
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)
Crisis Residential Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition
Education Development Center
EMDR International Association
Families USA
Florida – The Family Cafe, Inc.
Florida – The Renfrew Center
Georgia – The Renfrew Center
Georgia – Veritas Collaborative
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice
Illinois – SunCloud Health
Illinois – The Renfrew Center
Illinois – Timberline Knolls
Indiana – Mental Health America of Indiana
Indiana – Mental Health America of Knox County
Indiana Coalition against Domestic Violence, Inc.
Inseparable
International OCD Foundation
The JED Foundation
The Jewish Federations of North America
Kansas – McCallum Place
The Kennedy Forum
Learning Forward
Maryland – The Renfrew Center
Massachusetts – The Renfrew Center
Massachusetts Association for Mental Health
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
Mental Health America
Michigan – ASK Family Services (Kalamazoo)
Minnesota – The Emily Program
Missouri – Alsana
Missouri – McCallum Place
Missouri – Mental Health America of Eastern Missouri
NAMI, National Alliance on Mental Illness
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health
National Association for County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Pupil Transportation
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Federation of Families
National League for Nursing
National Network of Depression Centers
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Rural Education Association
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
New Jersey – The Renfrew Center
New York – The Renfrew Center
NHMH - No Health without Mental Health
NNDC (National Network of Depression Centers)
North Carolina – The Renfrew Center
North Carolina – Veritas Collaborative
Ohio – The Emily Program
Pennsylvania – Mental Health America of York
Pennsylvania – The Emily Program
Pennsylvania – The Renfrew Center
Postpartum Support International
Psychotherapy Action Network
REDC Consortium
RI International
Schizophrenia & Psychosis Action Alliance
SMART Recovery
Tennessee – The Renfrew Center
University of Texas at Austin Dell Medical School
Vibrant Emotional Health
Virginia – Veritas Collaborative
Washington – The Emily Program
Whitney/Strong Organization