

NASP Applauds Bipartisan Safer Communities Act

Bethesda, MD—The National Association of School Psychologists applauds the passage of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which represents a critical breakthrough in efforts to prevent gun violence in this country. The small but significant improvements to existing gun laws, combined with critical funding to support increased access to mental health services and violence prevention initiatives will save lives. We commend the Senators and Representatives who worked to craft and pass this bipartisan package, and look forward to President Biden signing the bill into law.

NASP is particularly pleased that the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act makes long needed investments in America's mental health care system, both in communities and schools. The \$1 billion investment in the School Based Mental Health Services Grant Program and the School Based Mental Health Service Professionals Demonstration Grants will help schools and communities find solutions to remedy the shortages of school psychologists, counselors, and social workers. School psychologists partner with families, teachers, school administrators, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community. They apply expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior to help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. They are also important members of school safety and crisis teams that support violence prevention efforts, as well as crisis response and recovery, including response to gun related tragedies. Addressing the shortages will ensure that more students have access to comprehensive school psychological services, which includes mental and behavioral health care.

Improving access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services, which include wellness promotion, early identification, and early intervention, will most certainly contribute to violence prevention. However, violence prevention is a benefit, not the primary goal of increasing access to school mental health services. These services support the healthy development of children and youth, facilitate improved student achievement, and are foundational to a safe and supportive learning environment. It will be imperative that policy makers not conflate mental illness with gun violence. Messages like these build on existing fear, discrimination, and stigma against individuals with mental illness and can prevent people from seeking the care they need.

While we do not support funding for ineffective efforts to harden schools, we will work with key decision makers to ensure the investments provided by this legislation are used to implement evidence-based strategies that meet the needs of the community. While this legislation will most certainly save lives, our work is not done. NASP will continue to advocate for additional gun safety policies, as outlined in our [Resolution to Support Efforts to Prevent Gun Violence](#), including bans on high-powered weapons and high capacity ammunition, improved awareness gun safety and safe storage practices, increased research on gun violence and gun violence prevention, and improved enforcement of existing laws.

NASP understands the importance of compromise, and we believe this bipartisan legislation is an admirable step in the right direction. We look forward to working with Congress, the Administration, and other policy makers to improve efforts to prevent gun violence and safeguard the well-being of our children, families, and communities.