NASP Applauds Bill to Increase Access to Mental Health Services in Schools

Bethesda, MD—Today, Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) and Congresswoman Susan Wild (D-PA) introduced the “Mental Health in Schools Excellence Program Act.” The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) commends Congressman Fitzpatrick and Congresswoman Wild for their leadership in introducing this legislation, which will improve access to school mental health services for America’s children and youth by encouraging students to pursue a career in school-based mental health.

“Schools across the country are grappling with how to meet the growing mental health needs of their students, including increasing suicide rates,” said NASP President Leslie Z. Paige. “Schools are an essential part of the mental health services continuum. Because they are the most accessible place to identify and support struggling students, it is paramount that we provide them the necessary resources to do so.”

Mental health problems can interfere with learning, behavior, social engagement, overall well-being, and sometimes physical safety. One in five students will experience a mental health problem that requires support, yet approximately 80% of them will not receive the necessary services. Of those who do receive services, the vast majority access them at school. Research shows that students are more likely to receive mental health services if they are offered at school—especially in low-income communities.

Unfortunately, we have a critical shortage of school psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals that prevents many students from receiving the mental health supports they need to thrive and succeed in school, at home, and in life. These professionals are specially trained to provide services in schools, which vastly enhances their effectiveness. This includes school-wide prevention and wellness promotion, assessment and evaluation of needs, individual and group counseling, consultation with teachers and administrators, and crisis intervention and recovery supports such as trauma informed supports and suicide risk and threat assessments.

This legislation is a critical step toward addressing the shortage and improving access to services by providing matching grants between the Department of Education and eligible graduate institutions to cover the cost of attendance for students who commit to 5 years of service in the field, post-
NASP Urges Support for the Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools Act

graduation. The Department may contribute up to 50% of the cost of attendance for a participating student, of which the graduate institution would match the other 50%.

Outreach efforts by the Department will be targeted to Federal Pell Grant-eligible students. If enacted, NASP believes this comprehensive, multipronged legislation will make a remarkably positive, long-term impact on students, schools, and communities.

“Providing access to mental and behavioral health services in schools makes them safer, promotes student well-being, and improves learning outcomes,” noted Paige. “We thank Representatives Fitzpatrick and Wild for their leadership on this critical issue by introducing legislation that will help communities train and recruit high-quality professionals to support our children’s mental health and learning.”

NASP urges other Members of Congress to support this legislation in the immediate and long-term interest of our children and country. Representatives interested in cosponsoring this bill should contact Joseph Knowles at joseph.knowles@mail.house.gov.

For further information on how school psychologists work with teachers, administrators, families, and other providers to support students’ mental health and learning, visit www.nasponline.org.

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