



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
School Psychologists

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April 26, 2022

Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Chair
House Labor, HHS, Education, and Related
Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

Honorable Patty Murray, Chair
Senate Labor, HHS, Education, and Related
Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

Honorable Tom Cole, Ranking Member
House Labor, HHS, Education, and Related
Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

Honorable Roy Blunt, Ranking Member
Senate Labor, HHS, Education, and Related
Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

On behalf of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), I urge you to include robust funding for the critical programs outlined in this letter as you consider federal appropriations for departments and agencies under the jurisdiction of your subcommittee for FY2023. NASP believes that the federal government has a responsibility to make meaningful investments in programs that help ensure all students have access to the academic, social-emotional, and mental and behavioral health services they need to thrive, and we support the PreK-12 and school-based mental health program funding increases proposed in President Biden's FY2023 budget request. Even prior to COVID-19, significant need existed among students for school-based mental health services and schools faced critical shortages of open positions and qualified practitioners, which includes essential school staff such as school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers and other specialized instructional support personnel. We applaud Congress for the education investments made in the final FY2022 appropriations bill and urge an even greater investment in our youth this appropriations cycle. However, we hope that Congress will avoid employing multiple continuing resolutions and commit to passing all FY2023 appropriations legislation by the end of the summer to allow states, districts, and schools ample time to plan and spend this critical federal education funding.

Addressing Shortages of School Mental Health Professionals

One of the most pressing issues facing our schools and students is the shortage of school mental and behavioral health providers. We appreciate the \$111M Congress provided in FY2022 for the ***Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program***. These grants provide funds to create university-district partnerships to increase the pipeline of properly trained school mental health professionals, like school psychologists, and support efforts to train, recruit, hire, and retain school mental health professionals, respectively. These investments are supporting strategies to address school mental health workforce shortages through efforts that include: grow your own programs; creation of new in person and online graduate education opportunities; placing supervised interns and practicum students in high needs schools to increase access to services; providing tuition support to reduce barriers to graduate education; facilitating increased training for mental health professionals and other key staff to increase capacity to identify and address mental health concerns with youth. ***We urge you to support the President's funding request and allocate \$1billion*** dollars to support continuation of existing grants, as well as allow for new competitions of both the Mental Health Service Professionals Demonstration Grant and the School Based Mental Health Services Grant Program to increase access to qualified school mental health professionals in high need districts.

Fully addressing the school mental health workforce shortages requires long term effort and investment. We need school-based mental health professionals trained to address student's behavioral and social needs, improve school climate, and address school safety concerns. While a \$1Billion investment is reasonable and necessary to address this problem, we acknowledge that this work will take time and sustained investments are critical to success. As such, we recommend a *minimum investment* of \$222 million in FY23 to support new competitions of both the Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program.

We also offer the following funding recommendations necessary to supporting access to a well rounded education in a safe and supportive learning environment. While the list below is not exhaustive, we consider these programs to be the most critical investments the Labor-HHS-ED subcommittee can make in order to improve outcomes for our nation's students.

Programs in the Department of Education

Elementary and Secondary Education

Title I-A (ESSA) Education for the Disadvantaged. \$36.5B. The quality of a child's education should not be dictated by their zip code. These grants provide financial assistance to schools and districts that serve students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In FY2022, Congress provided an historic \$1billion increase to this program. We urge you to continue to increase funding for this critical formula program to help ensure that our nation's vulnerable students have access to a high quality, well-rounded curriculum coupled with the academic, social-emotional, and mental and behavioral health supports needed to support both school and student success.

Title II-A (ESSA) Supporting Effective Instruction. \$3.0B. Our nation's teachers, principals, and specialized instructional support personnel must have access to high quality, relevant, and job-embedded professional development in order to maintain the provision of evidence-based practices that support student learning and a safe and supportive school climate. With an ever-shifting education landscape, it is imperative that our nation's educators stay on the cutting edge of education innovation and best practice. We urge you to increase funding for this program.

Title IV-A (ESSA) Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants. \$2.0B. Evidence-based efforts to promote a supportive school environment, student mental health and wellness, and school safety and violence prevention are directly linked to improved outcomes for students in school and in life. High quality teachers and effective school principals are certainly critical to student success, but students will not thrive if their psychological needs are not met in the school environment. Funding Title IV Part A at \$2B will provide states and districts with needed investments to ensure that every student attends a school with a safe and supportive learning environment. A full authorization would give students more access to desperately needed comprehensive school-based mental health services, including wellness promotion, early identification and intervention, and individualized services as needed. We urge you fund this program at its full authorization level.

Special Education and Rehabilitation Services

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part B, Grants to States. \$16.2B. In 1975, through the passage of the now named Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Congress committed to fund 40 percent of the cost of educating students with disabilities, yet this commitment has never been fully realized. This lack of funding has negatively impacted the education of students with disabilities and has caused fiscal challenges for school districts as they ensure the sufficiency of their own budgets. Since 2009, the average federal share per child as a percentage of the national average per pupil expenditure has declined in each year except one. FY2022's projected share per child was about 13% - only slightly above the FY2001 level. While the federal share has declined, the number of students with disabilities has increased by over 25 percent in the last 20 years, further amplifying Congress' broken promise. FY2023 presents a crucial opportunity to begin reversing the trend of a declining federal share of IDEA funding and meet our obligations to serving students with disabilities.

IDEA Part B Preschool Grants. \$503M. These funds help states provide a free appropriate public education to children with disabilities aged 3-5. This program serves approximately 815,000 children and helps to ensure that children are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten. We urge you to support this increase to ensure young children have access to early intervention and early education programming to increase their chances of success.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part C, Infants and Toddlers with

Disabilities, \$932M. Congress created IDEA Part C to provide early intervention for at-risk infants and toddlers with disabilities. Today, the program serves approximately 410,000 children from birth to age two. This program has only seen modest increases, despite the documented effectiveness of providing early intervention services. We urge you to increase the funding for this critical program by \$436 million over FY2022.

State Personnel Development. Requested: \$39M. We are currently experiencing a shortage of special education teachers and other professionals who provide services to students with disabilities. These grants provide funds to help state education agencies recruit and retain qualified professionals, while also supporting the capacity of both general and special education teachers to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

Personnel Development to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities: \$300M. This program is designed to increase the pipeline of well-prepared special education teachers, leaders, early interventionists, administrators, and specialized instructional support personnel. Given the critical impact of the pandemic on students with disabilities – in both academics and social/emotional well-being -- and the well documented shortage of special educators, a targeted and significantly increased investment is needed. Almost three quarters of these funds go for direct support for students, thus easing the financial burden of tuition. This program is an essential component of IDEA, investing in a foundation of special educators to carry out the mandate of Part B.

Programs in the Department of Health and Human Services

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Requested \$696.9M

Garret Lee Smith Memorial Act. Requested \$47.9M

Garret Lee Smith Suicide Prevention Resource Center Requested \$9M. Suicide rates are on the rise. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources, and best practices information for professionals. Increased funding would empower Lifeline to bolster call centers nationwide, fortify national back-up call centers, increase chat capabilities, and strengthen infrastructure and administration of Lifeline services. The Garrett Lee Smith (GLS) Memorial Act manages two significant youth suicide prevention programs and one resource center. The GLS SPRC builds national capacity for preventing suicide by providing technical assistance, training, and resources to develop suicide prevention strategies, including programs, interventions, and policies.

Project AWARE State Grants Requested \$244M. In order to address the rising rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues among our young people, we must equip our youth - and the adults who work with them - with the skills to recognize the signs of mental illness and connect those in need with critical services. These grants improve a state's ability to address the mental health of our nation's youth and build upon the successful strategies of the Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative.

Health Resources & Services Administration

Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET). Requested: \$225.8M. We are experiencing a critical shortage of mental and behavioral health professionals in our schools and communities. These shortages are especially pronounced in rural areas and for underserved populations. BHWET expands access to mental and behavioral health services by supporting internships and field placements for a variety of mental and behavioral health professionals, including school psychologists.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the important role schools play in meeting the comprehensive needs of students. We had a brewing mental health crisis before COVID-19, and the pandemic has only exacerbated existing need and has laid bare the critical need to address the shortages in school psychologists and other professionals who support the social-emotional learning and mental and behavioral health needs of students and staff. It is imperative

that we provide schools with the financial and human resources needed to ensure the success of every student not just as we recover from COVID, but for years to come. Strong investments in these and other programs will set our students, teachers, and communities on the path to success.

Thank you for your consideration and for your work in ensuring that federal dollars are spent wisely and on programs that will benefit our nation's children and youth. We believe that investments in these programs yield tremendous societal and economic benefits. Please contact Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach, NASP Director, Policy and Advocacy with any questions (kvaillancourt@naspweb.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathleen Minke".

Kathleen Minke, PhD, NCSP
Executive Director
National Association of School Psychologists