

June 7, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
Committee
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
Committee
217 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr,

On behalf of the undersigned mental health and substance use disorder organizations, we respectfully request your support of the bipartisan, bicameral Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Reauthorization Act (S. 4271) led by Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). This legislation would reauthorize this impactful federal grant program to support states, tribes, and campuses with the implementation of youth suicide prevention and early intervention strategies.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth in the United States.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated this crisis with 1 in 5 teens considering suicide during the pandemic.² Mental health-related emergency department visits for suicide attempts in early 2021 among adolescents 12-17 years of age increased by 31% compared with the same period in 2019.³ We also know that not all demographics are impacted the same. In 2019, suicide rates among American Indian and Alaskan Native adolescents (ages 15-19) were 60% higher than the national average for all teenagers.⁴ From 2003-2017, Black boys (ages 5 to 12 years old) were twice as likely to die by suicide compared to white peers.⁶ LGBTQ youth are more than 4 times as likely to attempt suicide compared to their straight and cisgender peers.⁴ Despite these trends, federal investment in suicide prevention has remained nearly stagnant and current funding levels do not meet the current needs for this population. For example, applicants for Garrett Lee Smith grant funding would have required an additional \$23.5 million in Fiscal Year 2019 alone.

From 2006-2015, Garrett Lee Smith initiatives have been shown to lower youth suicide rates and for a longer period of time in counties with these programs in comparison to counties without such programs in place.⁵ Another study showed that these programs implemented within counties was estimated to avert

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. About Underlying Cause of Death, 1999-2020.

² Ivey-Stephenson AZ, Demissie Z, Crosby AE, et al. Suicidal Ideation and Behaviors Among High School Students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2019. *MMWR Suppl* 2020;69(Suppl-1):47–55. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su6901a6>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Emergency Department Visits for Suspected Suicide Attempts Among Persons Aged 12-25 Years Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic—United States, January 2019–May 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7024e1.htm>.

⁴ Johns, M. M., Lowry, R., Haderxhanaj, L. T., et al. (2020). Trends in violence victimization and suicide risk by sexual identity among high school students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2015–2019. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 69,(Suppl-1):19–27. See also Johns, M. M., Lowry, R., Haderxhanaj, L. T., et al. (2020). Trends in violence victimization and suicide risk by sexual identity among high school students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2015–2019. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 69,(Suppl-1):19–27.

⁵ Godoy Garraza, L., Kuiper, N., Goldston, D., McKeon, R., & Walrath, C. (2019). Long-term impact of the Garrett Lee Smith Youth Suicide Prevention Program on youth suicide mortality, 2006-2015. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry, and allied disciplines*, 60(10), 1142–1147. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13058>

79,000 suicide attempts.⁶ Building off these previous successes, the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Reauthorization Act of 2022 would increase funding by approximately \$25 million for a total of \$72 million. Additionally, grant determinations must incentivize all elements an evidence-based framework of youth suicide prevention including leadership, training, identification, engagement, treatment, transition, and improvement.⁷

Furthermore, the mental health of college students was already an area of concern before COVID-19, with rates of depression among students increasing by almost 250% between 2000 and 2019.⁸ The pandemic has exacerbated these trends, evidenced by increases in depression, anxiety, substance use disorder, suicide, and post-traumatic stress disorder.⁹ However, while nearly half of colleges students report struggling with such concerns, just 40% of those students have received any mental health services in the past year.¹⁰ The highest rates of negative mental health impacts are being seen most among vulnerable and underrepresented students, including students of color and LGBTQ+ students, who also face the greatest barriers in accessing mental health care.^{11,12}

The Garrett Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention Grant Program is the only federal program currently available to directly support mental and behavioral health services for college students. The Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Reauthorization Act would increase the authorization for these grants by \$5 million for a total of \$12 million, which would allow for more campuses to access these critical funds. It would better target this funding towards under-resourced institutions, such as HBCU's, MSI's, HSI's, TCU's and community colleges. Additionally, by focusing further on prevention and wellness promotion, the bill recognizes that better mental health is essential for students to be successful in their education, persist in college, and graduate.

We thank you for your consideration for this critical piece of legislation and look forward to working with you to continue to protect the health and safety of our nation's youth.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

⁶ B., Reid, H., & McKeon, R. (2015). Effect of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Suicide Prevention Program on Suicide Attempts Among Youths. *JAMA psychiatry*, 72(11), 1143–1149. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2015.1933>

⁷ Education Development Center, Zero Suicide Framework. Retrieved from <https://zerosuicide.edc.org/about/framework>

⁸ National College Health Assessment, American College Health Association, 2000-2019.

⁹ The Generation Lab and Axios. (2020). Students and COVID: The college experience in the midst of a pandemic. Retrieved from: <https://www.generationlab.org/post/hidden-struggles-sink-fall-semester-for-students>.

¹⁰ "Depression, Anxiety, Loneliness Are Peaking in College Students," The Brink, February 17, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2021/depression-anxiety-loneliness-are-peaking-in-college-students/>.

¹¹ Center for Collegiate Mental Health. Pennsylvania State University. Part 3 of 5: Mental Health Impact of COVID-19 on Various Demographic Groups. February 16, 2020. Retrieved from: https://ccmh.psu.edu/index.php?option=com_dailyplanetblog&view=entry&year=2021&month=02&day=15&id=11:part-3-of-5-mental-health-impact-of-covid-19-on-various-demographic-groups.

¹² Higher Learning Advocates, Today's Students Mental Health Factsheet, May 2021. Retrieved from: https://higherlearningadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Todays-Students-Mental-Health-Factsheet_Final.pdf.

American Association of Child and Adolescent Physicians
American Dance Therapy Association
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
American Mental Health Counselors Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Anxiety and Depression Association of America
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness
Centerstone
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
Children's Hospital Association
Clinical Social Work Association
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
Inseparable
International Society for Psychiatric Mental health Nurses
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Eating Disorders Association
National Federation of Families
National League of Nursing
National Register of Health Service Psychologists
Psychotherapy Action Network (PsiAN)
REDC Consortium

RI International, Inc.

Sandy Hook Promise

SMART Recovery

The Jed Foundation

The Kennedy Forum

The Trevor Project

Treatment Communities of America

Trust for America's Health