

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

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

² Pruitt LD, Smolenski DJ, Tucker J, Issa F, Chodacki J, McGraw K, & Kennedy CH. (2019). Department of Defense Suicide Event Report (DoDSER): Calendar Year 2017 Annual Report. <https://www.dspo.mil/Portals/113/Documents/2017-DoDSER-Annual-Report.pdf?ver=2019-07-19-110951-577>

suicide.^{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.^{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.⁸

Firearms are now the leading cause of death for children and adolescents in the United States.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

³ FAIR Health. (March 2, 2021). [The Impact of COVID-19 on Pediatric Mental Health: A Study of Private Healthcare Claims.](#)

⁴ Radhakrishnan, Lakshmi, Leeb, Rebecca, Bitsko, Rebecca . . . & Anderson, Kayla. (February, 18, 2022). Pediatric Emergency Department Visits Associated with Mental Health Conditions Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic—United States, January 2019-January 2022. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 71. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/pdfs/mm7108e2-H.pdf>

⁵ Children's Hospital Association, September 2021, 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

⁶ Brekke JS, Prindle C, Bae SW, Long JD. Risks for individuals with schizophrenia who are living in the community. *Psychiatr Serv.* 2001 Oct;52(10):1358-66. doi: 10.1176/appi.ps.52.10.1358. PMID: 11585953.

⁷ Baumann ML, Teasdale B. Severe mental illness and firearm access: Is violence really the danger? *Int J Law Psychiatry.* 2018 Jan-Feb;56:44-49. doi: 10.1016/j.ijlp.2017.11.003. Epub 2017 Dec 7. PMID: 29701598.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Goldstick, Jason E., Cunningham, Rebecca M., Carter, Patrick M. Current Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States. 2022/04/20. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 386: 1955-1956. 10.1056/NEJMc220176. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2201761>.

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