



May 11, 2022

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Energy & Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Energy & Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone and Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers,

Sandy Hook Promise would like to express our gratitude for your commitment to addressing the United States' growing mental health crisis with the Restoring Hope for Mental Health and Wellbeing Act of 2022. We particularly appreciate your inclusion of provisions specifically addressing the mental health needs of our nation's youth.

Sandy Hook Promise is a national nonprofit organization founded and led by several family members whose loved ones were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. Based in Newtown, Connecticut, our intent is to honor all victims of violence, be it interpersonal or self-harm, by turning our tragedy into a moment of transformation. By empowering youth to "know the signs" and uniting all people who value the protection of children, we can take meaningful actions in schools, homes, and communities to prevent violence and stop the tragic loss of life.

The current mental health emergency in this country is particularly affecting our youth. Since 2010, suicide has been the second-leading cause of death for young Americans aged 10-24.¹ Youth between the ages of 10 and 17 are now more likely than any other age group to score for moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression.² Certain communities have borne the brunt of this tragic escalation. Suicide rates among American Indian and Alaskan Native adolescents aged 15-19 are 60% higher than the national average for all teenagers.³ Suicide and suicidal behaviors for Black youth are also rising; Black boys aged 5-12 are twice as likely to die by suicide as compared to their white peers.⁴

¹ Ten Leading Causes of Death and Injury Charts, Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/LeadingCauses.html>

² Mental Health America. (2021). The State Of Mental Health In America. MHA. Retrieved from <https://mhanational.org/get-involved/download2021-state-mental-health-america-report>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bridge, J., Horowitz, L., Fontanella, C., Sheftall, A., Greenhouse, J., Kelleher, K., & Campo, J. (2018). Age-Related Racial Disparity in Suicide Rates Among US Youths From 2001 Through 2015. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 172(7), 697. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2018.0399



The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these already alarming trends. Last fall, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Children’s Hospital Association (CHA), and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) declared a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health, specifically citing the toll of the pandemic.⁵ This was followed by a December 2021 U.S. Surgeon General advisory calling for a unified response to the mental health challenges facing young people.⁶

We thank this committee for taking steps to help meet the need identified by these advisories through the reauthorization of critical youth mental health programs. We are particularly grateful to see increased funding for the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act Suicide prevention program. This legislation was first passed by Congress in 2004, in memory of Garrett Lee Smith, the son of U.S. Senator Gordon Smith, who died by suicide just before his 22nd birthday. These grants provide resources to states, tribes, and campuses to help prevent suicide among youth and young adults.

Increased funding for the Garrett Lee Smith program could not be more important given the current mental health crisis. Prior to the pandemic, this program was already underfunded, with dozens of states and tribes not receiving funding each year. For example, funding all applicants from FY19 would have required an additional \$25.5 million a year. By increasing the funding for Garrett Lee Smith, this committee is helping ensure more youth across the country have access to critical mental health resources. We also encourage the committee to consider increased investment in youth mental health on campuses beyond grades K-12.

We know that access to mental health resources and programs has the power to save lives and help protect our children and youth. Thank you for your committee’s commitment to making mental health, especially youth mental health, a top priority.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Barden".

Mark Barden
(Daniel’s father)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole Hockley".

Nicole Hockley
(Dylan’s mom)

⁵ AAP, AACAP, CHA declare national emergency in children’s mental health (October 2021). <https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/17718>

⁶ U.S. Surgeon General Issues Advisory on Youth Mental Health Crisis Further Exposed by COVID-19 Pandemic, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (December 2021). <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/12/07/us-surgeon-general-issues-advisory-on-youth-mental-health-crisis-further-exposed-by-covid-19-pandemic.html>