Dear Senator Leahy, Senator Shelby, Chairwoman DeLauro, and Representative Cole:

As you develop the Fiscal Year 2023 appropriations bill, the Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice (CTIPP) and undersigned individuals and organizations encourage you to support the mental well-being of our nation’s youth by increasing the numbers of mental health professionals available to students and increasing the utilization of trauma-informed practices in our nation’s schools.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a widely traumatic experience for our youth. Toxic stress, loss, instability, and isolation have led to persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, an increase in suicidality, and overall poor mental health. In October 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children’s Hospital Association joined together to declare a National State of Emergency in Children’s Mental Health.

Even as students have returned to in-person learning, unresolved trauma may still live in their bodies and threaten their ability to succeed academically, live healthy lives, and form positive relationships. It is imperative that schools support students’ mental health and holistic well-being as it is the one place that nearly all youth in our country are served regularly.

School-based mental health professionals can play a vital role in supporting students’ holistic well-being and readying the entire school to support healing and resilience. School-based mental health professionals have been proven to improve staff retention, help keep students in school, and promote learning environments where students feel safe, supported, and ready to learn.

In addition to addressing the shortage of school-based mental health professionals in our country, which was a problem even before the pandemic, introducing trauma-informed practices in schools is a key component of supporting students. The workforce shortage undermines the availability of high-quality services to support students and families, particularly in rural, underserved, under-resourced, and other hard-to-staff school districts. Therefore, in addition to adding school-based mental health professionals, entire school communities need to be trained and supported to integrate trauma-informed mental health
services in schools. Trauma-informed schools help students and staff successfully address issues while improving the school’s capacity to identify, refer, and provide mental health services to help students in need. This two-part approach is necessary to support a positive school climate that benefits the students, their teachers, and all of the adults who are keeping schools functioning and safe at this time.

Therefore, we request that the Committee:

I. **Encourage the utilization of trauma-informed practices.**

Incorporating trauma-informed practices when addressing students’ mental health needs has been proven to further improve student success, including the reduction of expulsions by 31 percent, suspensions by 40 percent, and negative behavior referrals by 83 percent\(^1\). By adopting a trauma-informed approach, mental health professionals can help the entire school community to become better equipped to recognize, understand, and respond to the learning needs and well-being of children impacted by the traumatic effects of the pandemic and other adversities.

As such, we request language to support trauma-informed practices in grant activities:

*The Department encourages grant recipients to use trauma-informed practices in grant activities.*

II. **Provide $1 billion for the Safe Schools National Activities Program to support the School-Based Mental Health Professionals Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Program.** This funding level is consistent with the President’s budget request.

In FY 2022, Congress directed the Department of Education to set aside $111 million to fund new awards for the School-Based Mental Health Professionals Demonstration Grant and the School-Based Mental Health Services Program, funded via Safe Schools National Activities.

Combined, these two competitive grants address the critical shortage of school-based mental health professionals in two distinct and essential ways: increasing the available workforce, and helping districts support increased positions to improve access to services. Increased federal funding for these two programs is vital, due to the critical needs of states and districts.

III. **Provide continuing grants and new competitions for both grants.**

We also urge the inclusion of report language, specifying the $1 billion for the Safe Schools National Activities Program be divided between the Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant Program and the School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program to provide continuation grants to existing grantees and support new competitions so that even more schools can benefit from these programs:

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With the goal of addressing the shortage of school-based mental health professionals in our nation’s K-12 schools by expanding the pipeline of these professionals and improving districts’ ability to recruit and retain these professionals, the Committee directs the Secretary to allocate $500 million for the Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grant Program and $500 million for the School-Based Mental Health Services Grants to increase the number of well-trained school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists, or other mental health professionals qualified to provide school-based mental health services.

Thank you for considering our request for inclusion in the U.S. Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education bill. We are grateful for the leadership of Representatives Panetta, Payne, Fitzpatrick, and Underwood in advancing this request.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to make sure students are supported by healing-centered, resilience-focused, and trauma-informed approaches, practices, environments, and systems to reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

Jesse Kohler
Executive Director
Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice

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