

September 20, 2023

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy,

On behalf of the Child Trauma and ACEs Policy (CTAP) Working Group, made up of more than 30 national organizations dedicated to preventing and ameliorating child trauma and severe adversity, we thank you for your leadership around preventing children and youth from experiencing trauma and helping those who have been harmed by violence, parental addiction, abuse and other mental health challenges heal.

We write now to ask that as you consider reauthorization of the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act, you include several vital provisions that address the often-intergenerational connection between child trauma and substance use disorder and addiction. We know that by addressing childhood trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as exposure to domestic violence or child abuse or a parent with addiction or mental health issues, we can significantly reduce the number of young people who grow up to struggle with addiction, mental illness and abuse as adults. In addition, we ask you to consider important complimentary provisions from the RISE from Trauma Act, bipartisan, bicameral legislation that invests in communities hit particularly hard by opioids/addiction and violence, to target the needs of children and youth.

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2021, more than a third (37%) of high school students reported they experienced poor mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic and 44% reported they persistently felt sad or hopeless during the past year. The analyses also describe some of the severe challenges youth encountered during the COVID pandemic: more than half (55%) reported they experienced emotional abuse by a parent or other adult in the home, including swearing at, insulting, or putting down the student; 11% experienced physical abuse by a parent or other adult in the home, including hitting, beating, kicking, or physically hurting the student; and more than a quarter (29%) reported a parent or other adult in their home lost a job. Preliminary data from 2022 continue to show high rates of youth suicide and mental health struggles.

In order to address these crises, we request you include the following key priorities in the reauthorization of the SUPPORT Act:

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Research (CDC's Injury Center)

The CDC's National Center on Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) collects and reports data on ACEs and uses this data to support comprehensive prevention strategies. This work supports the Preventing ACEs: Data to Action grant, which helps communities better understand the burden of ACEs and implement strategies to prevent ACEs from occurring, <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/budget/acespolicy/ACEsInvestment.html>. Going forward, CDC has proposed combining ACEs research and activities with their Essentials for Childhood program,

which is focused on preventing child abuse and neglect. ACEs and abuse and neglect are overlapping and this would help increase efficiencies in administering these programs.
<https://www.cdc.gov/budget/documents/fy2024/fy-2024-cdc-congressional-justification.pdf>.

Trauma Support in Schools/Section 7134/Project AWARE (SAMHSA)

Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education) builds and expands the capacity of State Educational Agencies, in partnership with State Mental Health Agencies, to increase student awareness of mental health issues, provide training for school personnel on mental and behavioral health, and connect school-aged youth with needed mental health services. Project AWARE grantees, through the collaboration of state and local systems, seek to promote the healthy development of school-aged youth, provide support to students with significant behavioral and mental health needs, and prevent youth suicide and violence.

Interagency Task Force on Trauma-Informed Care (SAMHSA)

When Congress passed the SUPPORT Act it created an Interagency Task Force on Trauma-Informed Care chaired by SAMHSA. This Task Force was directed to identify, evaluate, and make recommendations regarding (1) best practices with respect to children and youth, and their parents and families as appropriate, who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing trauma; and (2) ways in which Federal agencies can better coordinate to improve the Federal response to families impacted by substance use disorders and other forms of trauma. The Interagency Task Force on Trauma-Informed Care is expected to release its report publicly soon and we recommend that the Task Force continue.

RESILIENCE, INVESTMENT, SUPPORT, AND EXPANSION (RISE) FROM TRAUMA ACT (S. 1426)

The CTAP Working Group has been pleased to work with Senators Durbin (D-IL) and Capito (R-WV), on the RISE from Trauma Act, S. 1426. The RISE Act, which has also been introduced in the House by Representatives Gallagher (R-WI) and Davis (D-IL), invests in the workforce and community programs necessary to get at the root causes of trauma, mental health and youth addiction. While the coalition strongly supports the entire legislation, we recommend the following provisions be included with the SUPPORT Act reauthorization:

Sec. 101– Local Coordination Grant Program: creates a new annual U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) grant program to fund community-based coalitions that coordinate stakeholders and deliver targeted local services to address trauma; and
Sec. 103 – Hospital-Based Interventions to Reduce Readmissions: Section 103 supports hospital-based trauma interventions to reduce suicide and other mental health readmissions. The grants created in Section 103 will deliver and evaluate hospital-based interventions to improve outcomes and reduce subsequent reinjury or readmissions of patients that present at a hospital after overdosing, attempting suicide, or suffering violent injury or abuse.

Thank you for your attention to this issue. We look forward to continuing our shared work to combat and prevent child exposure to traumatic events and violence.

Sincerely,
Afterschool Alliance
American Academy of Pediatrics

America Psychological Association
Boys and Girls Clubs of America
Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice
Center for Law and Social Policy
Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative
Committee For Children
Covenant House International
Family Focused Treatment Association
Futures Without Violence
Justice and Joy National Collaborative
MENTOR
National Head Start Association
National PTA
Social Current
Starr Commonwealth
Trust For America's Health
YMCA of the USA
YWCA USA