

National Association for Behavioral Healthcare



Access. Care. Recovery.

15 July 2021

To: U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee

Re: Education Funding for Children and Adolescents with Severe Behavioral and/or Emotional Conditions

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted a widespread need for improved access to behavioral health services and support for children and adolescents. Those with preexisting and more serious conditions have been most affected by the stress of the past year and a half. Children's hospitals in numerous states have reported increased numbers of children with severe depression presenting in their facilities and troubling spikes in the number of patients who thought about or attempted suicide.ⁱ The proportion of children's visits to emergency departments for mental health reasons increased dramatically starting in April 2020 and continued through October 2020, with increases of 24% for children aged 5-11 years and 31% for adolescents aged 12-17 years.ⁱⁱ

The National Association of Behavioral Healthcare (NABH) represents healthcare systems that provide a wide range of mental health and addiction treatment, including inpatient, residential, partial hospitalization, and outpatient services. Many of our members also provide educational services and supports for children and adolescents with the most severe behavioral and/or emotional conditions in residential settings, specialized day schools, and other settings. These therapeutic settings offer these children and adolescents a safe and stable environment to receive treatment and develop skills to enable them to transition back to their families and communities and local schools successfully. The education services and supports our members provide are particularly critical for maintaining structure and positive reinforcement for these children and adolescents during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We urge Congress to dedicate funding in the FY 2022 Labor-HHS-Education appropriations legislation to residential treatment facilities for education services and supports for children and adolescents with serious behavioral and/or emotional conditions. There are approximately 500 residential facilities serving 25,000 children and adolescents with serious behavioral and/or emotional conditions nationwide. An appropriation of \$37.5 million for education services in residential and specialized day schools would ensure these facilities are able to provide digital devices, internet access, and online school content to these children and adolescents with special needs.

Residential treatment centers focus on helping children and youth with the most serious emotional and/or behavioral conditions. These children and adolescents usually have experienced many hardships in their young lives. Severe emotional and behavioral conditions impair their ability to function and relate successfully to others in their communities, at home, and at school. They are at greater risk for dropping out of school, considering or dying by suicide, and committing crimes. These young people have needs that are so complex they require intensive 24-hour, out-of-home treatment to help them succeed.

The residential treatment programs, specialized day schools, and other therapeutic settings our members operate aim to provide a nurturing and safe environment for the children and youth they serve, improve their socialization skills, prevent out-of-home placements or stabilize these placements, improve academic achievement, increase self-esteem, and prevent involvement with juvenile justice. The child

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welfare, juvenile justice, and education systems that often identify these children and youth as having serious emotional or behavioral conditions do not have the expertise or time to address their needs.

Our members employ principals, teachers, and support staff to provide educational services in their residential and other specialized settings. During the Covid-19 crisis, the principals, teachers, and support staff in the residential settings continued to provide crucially needed education services and supports for these children and adolescents even while regular schools across the United States were closed.

As a result of Covid-19, these residential treatment settings and specialized schools have incurred significant increased costs that the Covid-19 relief legislation did not cover. These additional costs were for technology, additional cleaning, other infection-control protocols, curriculum materials, and additional safety measures. These facilities need more support to continue providing critical education services and supports to some of our most vulnerable children and adolescents.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns. If you have questions, please contact me directly at shawn@nabh.org or 202-875-4272, or contact NABH Director of Policy and Regulatory Affairs Kirsten Beronio at kirsten@nabh.org or 202-680-3095.

Sincerely,

Shawn Coughlin, President and CEO

ⁱ Rodriguez C. (2021, January 6). Children's Hospitals Grapple with Wave of Mental Illness. Kaiser Health News. Available at <https://khn.org/news/article/childrens-hospitals-grapple-with-wave-of-mental-illness/>

ⁱⁱ Leeb R, Bitsko R, Radhakrishnan L, et al: Mental health-related emergency department visits among children aged <18 During the Covid-19 pandemic - United States, January 1 - October 17, 2020 Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 69: 1675-1680, 2020. Available at https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm?s_cid=mm6945a3_w .

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