



Talking Points Mental Health Services for Students Act 2022-2023

General Talking Points

- Mental health is equally as important as physical health but is often stigmatized or viewed as less important. Our society must recognize that mental health is an essential component of overall well-being, and our government should work to ensure that all people have access to mental health care.
- Mental illness affects millions of Americans, including millions of young people.
 - 1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness each year.¹
 - 1 in 6 U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a serious mental health disorder each year.²
 - 71 percent of LGBTQ youth reported feeling sad or helpless for at least two weeks in the past year.³
 - LGBTQ youth are four times more likely to experience suicidal thoughts, self-harm, or attempt suicide compared to their non-LGBTQ peers.⁴
 - Depression is more likely to be persistent in Black people and Hispanics compared to whites.⁵
- Despite the widespread prevalence of mental illness, many people are still unable to access care.
 - Approximately 80 percent of children and adolescents with any type of mental health diagnosis have unmet mental health needs.⁶
 - Although Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals experience mental illness at roughly the same rates as white people, they are overall less likely to receive mental health services than white people.⁷
 - 54 percent of LGBTQ+ youth who reported needing mental health care within the past year did not receive it, and LGBTQ+ youth of color report greater unmet mental health needs.⁸
 - Some common barriers to accessing mental health services include social stigma, lack of information about mental health services, cost of treatment, distance to treatment, and long wait times. For Communities of Color, additional barriers include lower rates of insurance coverage, mistrust of the health care system due to decades of abuse and neglect, and lack of diversity among mental health practitioners.⁹ For LGBTQ+ youth, unique barriers include concerns about being outed, fears that a provider will not understand their sexual orientation or gender identity, and lack of LGBTQ+ providers.¹⁰
- Schools are in a prime position to provide mental health services for young people.
 - Although many young people are still unable to obtain care, 70 to 80 percent of students who do receive mental health services access these services at school.¹¹
 - Students seeking mental health resources are over 20 times more likely to visit school health centers than community centers.¹²

- Despite the importance of school-based mental health initiatives, many schools lack the resources or training to identify and treat mental health problems among their students.
 - 90 percent of public school students attend schools which fail to meet professional staffing requirements for counselors, social workers, nurses, and psychologists.¹³

Jewish Text and Values

- Judaism teaches that mental health is equally as important as physical health. In the traditional *Mi Shebeirach* (prayer for healing), we pray for a *r'fuah shleima* (a complete recovery), which includes *r'fuat hanefesh ur'fuat haguf* (a healing of the body and spirit).
- Judaism teaches that the government has an obligation to ensure that all people can access health care, including mental health care. In fact, Maimonides, a revered Jewish scholar and physician, placed health care first on his list of the ten most important communal services a city must offer its residents if the city is to be found worthy for a great scholar to live there (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De'ot IV:23).

Personal Story

You may wish to share a personal story about your own experience with mental illness, barriers you have faced when seeking mental health care, or the lack of mental health services at your school. You may also share a story about someone else. If you choose to do so, be sure to get their explicit permission whenever possible. If you are unable to contact them, try to keep their identity anonymous (for example, you might say “one of my classmates” without sharing their name).

Legislative Ask

The **Mental Health Services for Students Act (H.R.721/S.1841 in the 117th Congress)** would improve mental health care services in public schools by providing \$200 million in grant funding per year for five years to expand the Project Advancing Wellness and Resilience Education (Project AWARE) program. Under this legislation, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, will award individual grants of up to \$2 million to help schools partner with community mental health professionals to provide on-site care, train school personnel to recognize mental and behavioral health issues, facilitate community partnerships to improve mental health education, and establish mechanisms for students to report incidents or plans of violence by other students, adolescents, or adults.

This bill was led by Representative Grace Napolitano (D-CA-32), then-Representative John Katko (R-NY-24), and Senator Tina Smith (D-MN) in the 117th Congress. It passed the House of Representatives in May 2021 but did not pass the Senate. The bill has not yet been reintroduced in the House of Representatives or the Senate in the 118th Congress.

When crafting your legislative ask, refer to the lists below.

In the SENATE:

- If your Senator introduced the bill in the 117th Congress (Senator Tina Smith): I thank the Senator for leading the Mental Health Services for Students Act (S.1841 in the 117th Congress) last session and urge them to reintroduce the bill in the 118th Congress.

- All other Senators: I urge the Senator to cosponsor the Mental Health Services for Students Act (S.1841 in the 117th Congress) when it is reintroduced in the 118th Congress.

In the HOUSE:

- If your Representative introduced the bill in the 117th Congress (Rep. Grace Napolitano): I thank the Representative for leading the Mental Health Services for Students Act (H.R. 721 in the 117th Congress) last session and urge them to reintroduce the bill in the 118th Congress.
- All other Representatives: I urge the Representative to cosponsor the Mental Health Services for Students Act (H.R. 721 in the 117th Congress) when it is reintroduced in the 118th Congress.

Mental Health Resources

If you or someone you know is experiencing mental illness, please know that you are not alone. You can always reach out to a family member, friend, clergy member, or other trusted adult. Visit www.rac.org/MentalHealthResources for a list of major national hotlines in the United States and Canada as well as selected Jewish communal resources.

For More Information

If you have questions about these talking points or need more information, contact RAC Assistant Legislative Director Jacob Greenblatt at jgreenblatt@rac.org.

¹ <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/cbhsq-reports/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018/NSDUHNationalFindingsReport2018.pdf>

² <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2724377?guestAccessKey=f689aa19-31f1-481d-878a-6bf83844536a>

³ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Trevor-Project-National-Survey-Results-2019.pdf>

⁴ <https://healthlaw.org/resource/protections-for-lgbtq-people-with-behavioral-health-needs/>

⁵ “Mental Health Disparities: Diverse Populations.” American Psychiatric Association Factsheet (December 19, 2017)

⁶ https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/joint_info_bulletin_school_based_services_final_508_6.28.19.pdf

⁷ <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/association-racial-and-ethnic-social-networks-mental-health-service-utilization-across-minority-groups-usa>

⁸ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/breaking-barriers-to-quality-mental-health-care-for-lgbtq-youth/>

⁹ https://gucchd.georgetown.edu/products/Disparities_PolicyBrief.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/breaking-barriers-to-quality-mental-health-care-for-lgbtq-youth/>

¹¹ https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf

¹² https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf

¹³ https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf