Dear \* TITLE of STATE LEGISLATOR\* \*THEIR LAST NAME\* (e.g. Dear Senator Carson),

I am your constituent, a school psychologist, and a member of [\*YOUR STATE ASSOCIATION\*], an association that represents school psychologists across [\*YOURSTATE\*]. I wanted to bring to your attention a few issues that are critical to the well-being of students across our state. To reach their full potential, students require a school environment that is safe, supportive, and conducive to learning. Achieving this requires that students have access to the supports they need to be successful – especially in a time with so much uncertainty.

School psychologists like myself work with students, families, educators, administrators, and communities to ensure all of our students have the supports they need to be successful. We provide direct and indirect interventions to support student social-emotional learning, mental and behavioral health, and academic success. As schools shifted to distance education last spring, we immediately pivoted to supporting schools and families in a virtual environment.

I know firsthand that mental and behavioral health and wellness are critical to children’s and youth’s success in school and life. Schools are a natural and logical setting to provide mental health services and provides the ideal context for wellness promotion, prevention, and intervention – all of which directly affect learning and well-being. Current data estimate that one in five children will experience a significant mental health issue each year. Only about 20% of those students who need care will receive it, and of those who do receive assistance, the vast majority (70-80%) receive mental health services in schools. Students are also more likely to seek help if these services are in schools. Research shows that access to school-based mental health services is linked to improved students’ physical and psychological safety, academic performance, and social-emotional learning. These services reduce costly negative outcomes such as risky behaviors, disciplinary incidents, delinquency, dropout, substance abuse, and involvement with the criminal justice system. Simply put, all data point to the importance of every student having access to services from school-employed mental health professionals. With long-term effects on mental health expected and increasing need due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the toll inflicted on communities of color as a result of police brutality and systemic racism, these professionals are more important than ever.

Unfortunately, our current system of mental health services is simply inadequate to meet the need that exists in schools and communities. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500 students, but current national data estimates a ratio of 1:1,381, and [INSERT STATE-SPECIFIC SHORTAGE DATA, IF AVAILABLE] in [YOUR STATE].These shortages are even more drastic in urban and rural districts.

Even before the pandemic, many schools and districts still have not yet recovered from the 2009 recession. Schools are currently operating with 77,000 less teachers, school psychologists, school counselors, and other staff than they were during the 2009 recession; yet, we are serving 2 million more students. Unfortunately, oftentimes the first staff and programs to be cut are those that focus on support for student social-emotional learning and student mental and behavioral health, and several analyses indicate that without intervention, more than 1.5 million educator jobs could be lost.

The shortage of school psychologists already makes it difficult to meet student needs because it results in unmanageable caseloads, an inability to provide preventive services, and too narrow a roll for school psychologists who are limited to legally mandated special education compliance efforts. In order to effectively meet the increasing mental, behavioral, and social-emotional health needs of students, legislation specifically focused on addressing the shortage of school-employed mental health professionals in our public schools is absolutely necessary.

[INSERT LANGUAGE FOR ANY OTHER STATE-SPECIFIC ASKS]

This is a crisis, and we simply cannot fail our students and their educational needs. Now, more than ever, we need to be doing more, not less, to support student and staff wellness.

Thank you for all the work that you do on behalf of our district and for taking the time to read my letter. If you have any questions, or would like to further discuss any issues related to school psychology, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME