Month Day, Year

The Honorable \*FIRST and LAST NAME\*

Street Address

City, State Zip Code

Dear Senator/Representative \*LAST NAME\*,

My name is \*YOUR NAME\*, and I am writing to you in my capacity as a constituent[WHEN APPLICABLE] and as \*YOUR TITLE\* at \*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 like today, with so much uncertainty.

School psychologists work with students, families, educators, administrators, and communities to ensure all 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.

We 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. We urge you to support the following bills:

* H.R. 2958/S. 1642, the “Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools Act”
* H.R. 4025, the “Mental Health in Schools Excellence Program Act”
* H.R. 4381/S. 2499, the “Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act”

In addition, we were pleased that the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act included $13.5 billion in the Education Stabilization Fund earmarked for elementary and secondary education. However, the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic requires additional assistance from Congress to assist millions of students coping with the emotional stressors and mental health needs brought forth by COVID-19 and related school closures. We urge you to pass an additional COVID-19 response package as soon as possible, that includes the following:

* **Investments in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).** Please consider a significant allocation specifically to help address the needs of students with disabilities. A much greater investment is required to both address the immediate needs of students with disabilities and to ensure legally protected and mandated supports that are not currently being provided due to school closures.
* **Investments in Comprehensive School Mental and Behavioral Health Services.** Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services are critical to support student learning and success, and are even more vital during a time of national crisis and uncertainty. Students are unable to benefit from high-quality instruction without social-emotional and mental health stability. We ask that you advocate for Congress to provide funding specifically to help schools, in collaboration with key community partners, continue to address the comprehensive mental and behavioral health needs of students in a virtual setting and upon their reentry to school.
* **Increased and Improved Access to Internet.** The CARES Act did not included a proposed Emergency Connectivity Fund to provide $2 billion to schools and libraries for Wi-Fi hotspots, connected devices and mobile broadband Internet service. Recent studies have suggested that between 7 million and 12 million students have no Internet access at home and only 1 out of 4 school districts indicate they currently offer loaner hotspots. This is an insurmountable barrier for far too many students without necessary supports. To help promote equitable access to the curriculum, comprehensive learning supports, including mental and behavioral health services, it is imperative that Congress provide funding to address this critical infrastructure gap.

On behalf of \*\*YOUR STATE ASSOCIATION\*\*, we look forward to having the opportunity to work with you on these issues. If you have any questions, or would like to further discuss any issues related to school psychology, you can reach me at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME
YOUR TOWN, YOUR STATE

\*YOUR TITLE\*

\*YOUR STATE ASSOCIATION\*

**About the \*Your Association\***

Insert about here