

April 15, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leaders Schumer and McCarthy:

As Congress considers a new legislative package in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the nation's frontline school health providers urge you to provide critical funding to support the continued operations of school-based health centers (SBHCs). As K-12 public schools across the nation have closed in response to this pandemic, most SBHCs have been forced to temporarily close as well. Without additional funding, we fear many SBHC closures will be permanent.

School-based health centers (SBHCs) are critical access points that provide comprehensive care—including primary care, behavioral and oral health services, as well as prevention and early intervention services—to children and adolescents in their school, a location that is safe, convenient, and accessible. SBHCs provide this care through partnerships with community health providers, such as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), local health departments, hospitals, schools, and other community institutions. Currently, more than 2,500 school-based health centers (SBHCs) operate in rural, urban and suburban communities, in 48 states and the District of Columbia and serve primarily low-income and medically underserved children and adolescents.

SBHCs are a time tested model for improving health and education outcomes. Decades of research exists to support the role of SBHCs in reducing health care costs and removing barriers to health care, as well as improving attendance and school connectedness. The Community Preventive Services Task Force (an independent panel of public health and prevention experts) recommends SBHCs as an **“effective intervention for improving health equity and influencing health and educational outcomes.”**

As the nation's FQHCs, local health departments, hospitals and other community health providers respond to this pandemic, tough choices are being made on where to focus limited resources, services and clinical staff. For many SBHC providers this has meant layoffs, furloughs and reassignment to non-school-based sites. While many SBHCs have expanded the use of telehealth to continue providing care during this time, this is not a sustainable business model for the long term. Additional federal funding for SBHCs will ensure that centers can continue to provide invaluable care for students and families, even while schools remain closed for the foreseeable future.

We recommend \$100 million to support the continued operation of SBHCs, a critical safety net provider. This investment will help ensure that SBHCs are able to expand the use of telehealth and other virtual services while schools remain closed and reopen their doors fully when school resumes. Without additional assistance, many SBHCs will be forced to permanently close, leaving millions of students, particularly those in Title 1 schools, without access to health care and support services during a time when they are needed more than ever.

For most of America's children and adolescents, they will likely not step foot in their school again before Fall. For many, this will mean months of untreated chronic illness, missed preventive care visits, including vaccinations, and unmet mental health needs. For many of these children, they will return to school with the added trauma of having lost loved ones and the stress of economic instability within their families. We also know this virus will not disappear when school returns, and SBHCs will have a critical role to play as frontline responders in the schools to control further spread. Now more than ever, no school or community can afford to lose their SBHC. We urge you to act now to prevent this.

Sincerely,

School-Based Health Alliance
California School-Based Health Alliance
Colorado Association for School-Based Health Care
Connecticut Association of School-Based Health Centers
Georgia School-Based Health Alliance
Illinois School-Based Health Alliance
Louisiana School-Based Health Alliance
Maryland Assembly on School-Based Health Care
Massachusetts School-Based Health Alliance
School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan
Minnesota School-Based Health Center Alliance
Show-Me School-Based Health Alliance of Missouri
Health N Wellness Services, LLC (New Jersey)
New Mexico Alliance for School-Based Health Care
New York School-Based Health Alliance
North Carolina School-Based Health Alliance
Oregon School-Based Health Alliance
Washington School-Based Health Alliance