

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1304

July 7, 2022

Dear Illinois Education Leaders:

Gun violence is traumatizing an entire generation of kids as the leading cause of death for children in America. Our country demanded that Congress step up and address this public health epidemic. Last month, the Senate passed and the President signed into law the *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act*—the most significant gun safety reform legislation in a generation. This legislation provides meaningful policy reforms and resources that will help protect our kids and communities from the toll of gun violence.

Your schools and communities know this challenge all too well. The threat of physical violence within your walls and your surrounding neighborhoods is an ever-present worry. Millions of students nationwide enter the classroom each day carrying the emotional trauma of having suffered or witnessed violence or other Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Decades of science tell us that experiencing trauma can harm brain development—making it harder for students to pay attention, regulate emotions, form healthy relationships, and resolve conflicts. Numerous studies have shown that students who are exposed to violence in their neighborhoods have higher rates of mental health challenges. And children with multiple ACEs typically have worse educational outcomes.

With the right resources and approaches, these challenges can be overcome. Children who have faced trauma can be supported to cope with their experiences and build resilience through safe, stable, and nurturing environments—especially in the classroom. Many evidence-based strategies, programs, and interventions work to help prevent and mitigate the impact of trauma to enable our students to thrive. These trauma-informed efforts support children and are a vital strategy to prevent and break the cycle of violence.

The *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act* provides more than \$3 billion to schools and communities to support mental health, counseling, and trauma efforts. I write to draw your attention to several specific funding opportunities available for schools in Illinois through the Department of Education, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) within the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Justice (DOJ), and Medicaid:

- \$1 billion for Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):
 - This funding is available for state/local governments to provide services to promote safe and healthy students. Services may include mental health resources, drug and violence prevention, mentoring, crisis intervention, and high-quality training for school personnel on trauma-informed practices. School districts may

- be able to partner with other eligible entities to apply for these funds to deliver training and trauma-informed care to children.
- \$50 million for 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) of ESEA:
 - This funding is available to state/local governments to improve and expand the 21st CCLCs, which serves students before and after school and during the summer months. The 21st CCLCs provide academic enrichment and development opportunities for low-income students.
 - \$1 billion for the School Based Mental Health Services Grants program and the Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grants program:
 - Funding for the School Based Mental Health Services Grants program is available for state governments to retain and increase the number of school-based mental health service providers for school districts with demonstrated need. Funding for the Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration Grants program supports innovative partnerships to train school-based mental health service providers for employment in schools.
 - \$40 million for SAMHSA’s National Child Traumatic Stress Network:
 - This funding is available for state/local governments, universities, hospitals, and community-based organizations to promote effective practices to support children who have experienced trauma. School districts may be able to partner with other eligible entities to apply for these funds to deliver training and trauma-informed care to children.
 - \$240 million for SAMHSA’s Project AWARE, including \$28 million for Trauma Support in Schools Grants authorized under Sec. 7134 of the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act:
 - This funding is available to state/local education agencies to identify and support students with mental health needs through training, screening procedures, and referrals to community providers. I created the Sec. 7134 grants in 2018 with Senator Capito (R-WV) to expand the delivery of trauma-informed care in schools through training of school personnel, development of in-school protocols, counseling and programming for students and families, and linkages with clinicians in the community.
 - \$120 million for SAMHSA’s Mental Health Awareness Training:
 - This funding is available to local education agencies and other stakeholders to provide mental health literacy training to school personnel and other stakeholders, such as first responders, on how to recognize signs and symptoms of mental health issues, and facilitate appropriate connections to clinical care.
 - New Medicaid Resources to Expand Access to School-based Mental Health Care:
 - Sec. 11003 of the *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act* directs the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), in consultation with the Secretary of Education, to issue guidance to state Medicaid agencies and schools on how to expand the delivery of medical care in schools under Medicaid. This section specifically directs CMS to update the 2016 Free Care letter, 2003 Claiming Guide, the 1997 Technical Assistance Guide, and other resources to clarify the ability for school-based entities to furnish Medicaid-covered services in schools. This new CMS guidance will outline strategies, best practices, and tools to maximize Medicaid reimbursements for eligible services—including the early and

periodic screening, diagnostic, and treatment benefit—and to reduce administrative burdens and simplify billing procedures.

- \$300 million for DOJ’s STOP School Violence grants:
 - This funding is available for grants to help state and local governments improve K-12 school safety, including efforts to support training and education for school personnel to respond to mental health crises; establish intervention teams; create technology solutions such as anonymous reporting systems; acquire locks, lighting, and other deterrent measures; provide technology and training; and more.

While the gun violence epidemic in America is a complex challenge that no single piece of legislation can solve, the investments and policies included in the *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act* hold the promise of delivering meaningful benefits to schools and communities. I encourage your schools to explore these federal funding opportunities, and I stand ready to assist constituent applications to bring more school safety, mental health, and trauma support resources to schools in Illinois.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator