ISSUE:
Historically, 1 in 5 youth experience some type of mental health disorder that can cause significant challenges at home, school, and in their community. Yet only 10 percent of U.S. children and adolescents ages 3 to 17-years-old typically receive any treatment or counseling from a mental health professional. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this disparity even worse.

BACKGROUND:
Early interventions are critical for successful mental health treatment. Schools are an important setting to help identify mental health problems early, whether in-person or virtual. Schools also can be a crucial link to mental health services for students, especially in rural communities, where resources are scarce. The need for school-based mental health services has never been greater. For example, by the end of high school, one student in five will have experienced an episode of depression. With early identification and treatment, mental health disorders often can be addressed before significant impairment occurs. If left untreated, these disorders can lead to academic failure, family conflicts, substance use, and even suicide.

SOLUTION: The “Mental Health Services for Students Act of 2021”
School administrators, teachers and other staff need support to respond appropriately to the mental health needs of their students. The “Mental Health Services for Students Act” would help to address these needs by providing up to $2 million in new grant funding for each of five years to revise, increase, and expand SAMHSA’s existing Project AWARE State Educational Grant Program for mental health services. These increased grants would help schools provide much-needed school-based mental health services for students to:

- Help schools partner with community mental health professionals, including child and adolescent psychiatrists, to provide behavioral and mental health services for K-12 students that is trauma-informed and evidence-based;
- Provide appropriate professional development to school personnel to help recognize the early signs of mental or behavioral health issues;
- Help local communities develop policies to assist students in dealing with trauma and violence; and
- Establish mechanisms for children and adolescents to report incidents of violence or plans by other children, adolescents, or adults to commit violence.

CONGRESSIONAL ASK:
Thank you to House Members who passed H.R. 721, “Mental Health Services for Students Act of 2021” by Reps. Napolitano (D-CA), Katko (R-NY), on May 12, 2021.

Senators, please co-sponsor and advance companion bill S. ____, sponsored by Sen. Smith (D-MN)