

## COVID-19 Response and Recovery Toolkit: Educating and Engaging Congress on the Necessity of a Trauma-Informed Response

(prepared April 27, 2020)

Your congressional delegation needs to learn from you, their constituent, about the trauma science and how to apply it to and through COVID-19 federal policies and programs. The National Trauma Campaign is here to support your outreach and advocacy.

### **Call to Action**

#### **Actions to Take Right Now, beginning April 27**

**Prepare an example(s) or story.** Think of an example(s) or story that illustrates the traumatic impact the pandemic is causing in your congressional district (for U.S. Representatives) and/or the state (for U.S. Senators).

These stories will be of the greatest importance to them. If you need help or further guidance on this, please email [traumacampaign@gmail.com](mailto:traumacampaign@gmail.com).

**Reach out to your point of contact.** Email your point of contact in each of the offices in your congressional delegation.

As an individual constituent, you have one U.S. Representative and two U.S. Senators in your delegation; an organization may have a larger overall congressional delegation, if it covers more than one House district and/or more than one state.

**To identify your U.S. Representative and two U.S. Senators**, as well as links to their contact information and website, follow these links - [Find Your U.S. Representative](#) and [Find your U.S. Senator](#).

**Identify the appropriate congressional staffer from each office.** Once you identify the members of your congressional delegation, call their main office line and ask for the name and email of the staff person who covers child and family issues and/or health and mental health issues for the congressperson. This is the person you want to develop a relationship and open line of communication with.

**Seek opportunities to participate in virtual events that feature your congressperson.** Sign up to receive emails from the members of your congressional delegation and watch for opportunities to participate in virtual meetings. Join those meetings and use the National Trauma Campaign tools to raise issues about trauma and the need to have a trauma-informed response from Congress. (Note: Sometimes these events are hosted by the political parties, so you may also want to follow the Republican and Democrat organizations for your state and district.)

If you have the opportunity to raise a question during a virtual event, here is a sample question you can ask:

Research makes it clear that children and adults who live through disasters can experience trauma, which has long-term effects if not addressed. Children and adults need their environments, such as schools and workplaces, to be prepared to recognize trauma and equipped to respond appropriately. Will you champion provisions in a future federal COVID bill that work to make public systems trauma-informed as part of our nation's response to the widespread trauma caused by the pandemic? (Optional: I can serve as a resource for you/your office on this topic.)

**Use Campaign tools to make it easy.** Use the National Trauma Campaign's COVID-19 advocacy tools in your email to congressional offices.

For your email outreach, this Toolkit provides:

- Template email to your U.S. Representative (see page 3)
- [Recommended Campaign infographic](#)
- Links to a three-minute [video](#) and [companion infographic](#) on the COVID-19 Trauma Tsunami and trauma science
- [COVID-19 Dear Colleague Letter to House Leadership](#)

**Keep your outreach goals in mind.** At this stage, these are the goals you can strive to achieve:

1. Build, or build on, your relationship with the congressional staffer.
2. Share information with the staffer on how the pandemic is causing trauma for the congressperson's constituents.
3. Ask the congressperson to support the provisions in the [Dear Colleague Letter](#) from April 17.
4. Confirm with the staffer that she/he will take your information to his/her boss (the congressperson).
5. Share the Campaign's *COVID-19 Trauma Tsunami* video and the two infographics with your contact in the congressional office (hyperlinked above).
6. Open, and keep open, a line of communication to follow up with additional information or "asks" as the fourth congressional COVID-19 bill takes shape.

## Next steps with the National Trauma Campaign

### At the National Level

**Be ready to activate in support of trauma-informed federal policies.** The National Trauma Campaign is working with any national organizations, and with congressional trauma champions, to devise a set of federal policy proposals for future, federal COVID-19 legislation. When the policy agenda is complete, we will likely equip you to reach out again to your congressional contacts to build their support for the policies.

**Optional - Engage with media.** Use the sample social media messages in this Toolkit (listed below). Write an op-ed for your local newspaper, respond to an article in the newspaper with a Letter to the Editor, or pitch the topic to a policy news blogger and offer local (you) and national (the Campaign) interviewees and perspective.

### Optional - State/Local Action

**Work with state and local officials and leaders.** There are four new federal COVID-19 laws and none were written with the trauma science in mind. However, there are opportunities to implement them, in your state and locally, in a trauma-informed manner. Take a look at the National Trauma Campaign's [List of Federal Provisions to Implement Using a Trauma-Informed Approach](#) for ideas.

**Give leadership to using a trauma lens in COVID-19 policies.** Use a trauma lens to analyze new laws and policies that are already in place. You can also generate policy ideas by looking at the challenges you see through a trauma lens and proposing solutions. Use the [National Trauma Campaign's Tool for Analyzing COVID-19 Response and Recovery Policy Through the Lens of Trauma Science and Practice](#).

**Template Email to Your U.S. Representative** *(IN DRAFT as of April 27, 2020)*

*If this is your first communication with your congressional office, you can use this template to introduce yourself. If you already have made the connection with a staffer, feel free to modify this template accordingly.*

Dear Representative **[INSERT LAST NAME]**:

**I am writing as your constituent to urge you to champion the necessity to respond to the mental and behavioral health needs of children, families, and communities affected by the traumatic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.** [(If you are writing on behalf of an organization) I represent **INSERT NAME AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF YOUR ORGANIZATION**]

On behalf of the hundreds of advocates, practitioners, and researchers who join **[me/INSERT YOUR ORGANIZATION'S NAME]** as part of the National Trauma Campaign, I am asking you to prioritize funding for trauma-related programs and approaches in upcoming legislation responding to the pandemic.

**The fear, anxiety, isolation, and economic insecurity from the COVID-19 pandemic are traumatic experiences that can cause long-term health consequences, if not addressed.**

Research from past disasters shows that children are particularly negatively impacted by disaster, with the potential for lifelong consequences for their physical and mental health, as well as for their educational achievement. We know that directly supporting trauma-informed and responsive approaches and programs across all public systems that come in contact with children and families - like education, child welfare, health care, workforce, law enforcement, courts - can and will help them thrive now, during the period of social isolation, and when the physical threat of the pandemic is contained.

**[OPTIONAL: In a few sentences, describe how you are seeing the effects of trauma in your state, community or organization right now.]**

Last year, before the pandemic became our reality, the World Health Organization issued a report finding that the health care costs alone caused by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in the United States exceeds \$700 billion a year. Since Congress funds around 30% of all health care services in this country, ACEs cost the federal budget over \$200 billion a year in health care costs alone. The adversity that children and families experience because of the pandemic will likely drive those costs up even further.

**Representatives Trone and Riggleson submitted a [Dear Colleague letter](#) to House leadership on April 17 that recommends some trauma-informed provisions to include in future federal COVID-19 response legislation, including:**

- Support for Community and School Based Trauma Informed Responses so that educators are prepared to recognize trauma and help stabilize students who are negatively impacted by the stress caused or worsened by the pandemic;
- Provide additional Resources for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network;
- Provide \$30 million in supplemental appropriations for SAMSHA's Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education) state education agency grants.

**I request that you support the inclusion of provisions that make our public systems trauma-informed in the next COVID-19 bill.**

For further information and background, here is a [three-minute video](#) and [infographic](#) that covers the science of trauma. And, here is an [infographic](#) that conveys how addressing trauma can improve lives.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have about that letter and will be reaching out to you again with additional ideas for future legislation.

Please feel free to contact me at [\[INSERT YOUR EMAIL and PHONE NUMBER\]](#).

Sincerely,

### **Sample Social Media Messages**

*@YourRepresentative*

As a constituent, I urge you to prioritize trauma-related programs that support the health and wellbeing of vulnerable children and families across America in the next #COVID19 response bill. #TransformTrauma #TransformChildhoodTrauma <https://bit.ly/2SqGL4X>

*@AnyPolicymaker...*

Prioritizing #TraumaInformed policies & practices is critical if we, as a [\[COMMUNITY / STATE / NATION\]](#), are to be resilient in the face of a post-pandemic mental health epidemic. As a constituent, I invite you to consider these policy proposals: #TransformTrauma #CTIPP

As a voter, I urge you to support policies that strengthen the implementation of trauma-informed care in response to #COVID19. You can help position [\[AMERICA / STATE / COUNTY / ETC. DEPENDING ON WHO YOU ARE CONTACTING\]](#) to respond to trauma such that we all may move toward resilient, healthy futures. #TransformTrauma #CTIPP

#COVID19 is ushering in a costly #MentalHealth crisis for America. As a [\[TWO-LETTER STATE ABBREVIATION\]](#) voter, I urge you to consider the pandemic's impact on our collective mental health and to prioritize bolstering #resilience and wellbeing through trauma-informed #coronavirus legislation. #TransformTrauma

#COVID19 itself is a collective trauma, the impacts of which will ripple through our lives & our larger society for generations. As your constituent, I encourage you to prioritize #traumainformed policies & practices to build #resilience for our future. #transformtrauma

The #coronavirus may devastate our most vulnerable communities for generations. As your voter, I urge you to respond with #TraumaInformed legislation so that we may prevent such problems & create healthy, #resilient futures for us all. #TransformTrauma

As your constituent, I urge you to incorporate a #TraumaInformed lens when creating policies to respond to #COVID19. We can target overwhelming #stress, thwart re-traumatization, and foster #resilience to emerge from this era a stronger, healthier nation. #TransformTrauma

*@YourGovernor*

As a [INSERT TWO-LETTER STATE ABBREVIATION] voter, I urge you to use flexible, federal GEER funds to support school-based, trauma-informed responses that help children & families build resilience to strengthen learning now and emerge from the #COVID19 era ready to return to the classroom. #TransformChildhoodTrauma