

Draft sample letter for a state coalition to send to its Governor

Dear Governor (Name):

As participants in a growing and vital trauma-informed movement in [State], we are writing on behalf of a coalition of organizations that have joined in the fight to reduce adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and heal trauma across the lifespan, and to build resilient communities across our state. As you lead our state's efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to consider how ACEs science can be applied to prevent and reduce a vast range of health and social problems rooted in trauma—problems that existed prior to the pandemic but have been exacerbated by it.

Based on the scientific evidence about the impact of trauma—especially in childhood when the effects are most significant—and what we have learned from our experience of natural and manmade disasters, we know to expect long-lasting and widespread impacts on health, both physical and mental, from the current pandemic. If the funding provided to states in the CARES Act and future legislation is used to support trauma-informed approaches, the investments will likely yield improved results for the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. The likelihood of a post-pandemic explosion of health, economic, and social problems can be lessened if trauma-informed approaches are taken now and going forward. The dire warning signs of increases in domestic violence, child abuse, substance use disorders, and other indicators of distress lend urgency to our recommendations.

One of the most fertile places for applying trauma-informed approaches is in the education of young children. A child who has experienced or continues to experience stressful situations at home, such as a parent's job loss, illness, and food insecurity, needs a school environment—whether physical or virtual—that recognizes the impact on learning that these other factors will have. Individual schools and districts across the nation have undertaken efforts to become trauma-informed, but all schools, especially now, must undertake this transformation. After Hurricane Harvey, the Houston Independent School District undertook to implement trauma-informed programs in which faculty was trained before school reopened on how to address behaviors of students in response to trauma after disasters. As a result, they were able to minimize those effects of trauma, saving the school the enormous costs and disruptions other schools faced after disasters.

As leaders in the [name the statewide trauma-informed initiative], we have gained the expertise to identify the steps, similar to those taken by Houston, to reduce the severe health and social problems that trauma is and will continue to create. In [State], our trauma-informed community has implemented a broad range of programs to address childhood and other forms of trauma. We would like to partner with the state government and other organizations as we grapple with the explosion of pandemic-caused trauma. Examples of trauma-informed initiatives already being provided in the State include: [provide some state example here]

We urge you to allocate a small portion of the funds the State will be receiving from the CARES Act to incorporate trauma-informed approaches as programs are redesigned during the pandemic. Many of these programs are not expensive and have the potential to save the State and local communities a substantial amount of money that would otherwise need to be spent on addressing these health and social problems in the future. Our recommendations include:

1. Using a portion of the Governors' Educational Emergency Relief (GEER) Fund to make available on-line training to every school in the State to enable their schools to become trauma-informed and thus prepared to ameliorate the trauma impacts of COVID-19;
2. Encouraging the LEAs in the State to use a portion of the funds they will be receiving under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund to provide intensive training to its counselors so they will be able to lead the implementation of trauma-informed programs in their schools;
3. Using a portion of the additional funds it will receive in the Community Services Block Grant program to provide trauma-informed training to law enforcement agencies, social services programs and other social support networks so they are prepared to address increased domestic violence, substance use, and other trauma-related problems;

Implementation of any of the innovative and tested trauma-informed programs we are suggesting can begin now and can continue in the post-quarantine period. Over the past few difficult months, we have learned all too well what happens when we fail to take action to mitigate disasters that we have been warned are coming our way. This time we should take the early warning signs seriously and initiate the actions set out above to reduce the impact of the long economic and social recovery ahead.

The [organization, coalition of trauma-informed organization, etc.] is available to put the lessons that our experiences and science have taught us about the causes and effects of trauma to work to assist you protect the health and welfare of the citizens of [STATE].

Sincerely,

Your Name
Your Statewide Coalition