

COVID-19 Response Toolkit: Educating and Engaging Congress on the Necessity of a Trauma-Informed Response (September 2020)

Call to Action – Week of September 7th

Please complete this Call to Action during the week of September 7th:

Congress is returning from August recess and they have a number of important items pending before them. We remain hopeful that there will be another COVID response bill. It is important that both your House Member and your Senators hear from you this week. The National Trauma Campaign is here to support your outreach and advocacy.

Key Message:

Include funding for trauma-related programs and approaches in any legislation responding to the pandemic.

Policy Requests:

1. Increase funding for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN).
2. Increase funding for Project AWARE.
3. Additional support for school mental health & trauma-informed programs.
4. Fund the Federal Interagency Task Force on child trauma.
5. Establish local-based coordinating bodies to address the impact of stress and trauma in their communities.

For this Call to Action, your goals are:

- Build on your personal relationship with your Congressional Office.
- Share information with the staffer on traumatic experiences the pandemic is causing in your state.
- Ask the office to support your policy request.
- Provide supporting information to the office.

Background:

Congress did not reach a deal on another round of COVID-19 related supports before taking August Recess. Negotiations are anticipated when Congress returns to the Capitol after Labor Day. It is important that Members in both the House and Senate continue to hear from you about trauma-related provisions.

The Campaign is also advocating for the inclusion of funding for trauma-informed programs in the appropriations bills for FY 21 which begins October 1st. However, the Congress

leadership has indicated that, rather than passing regular appropriations bills before October 1st, it will pass a clean Continuing Resolution (CR) which just carries the FY20 appropriations forward for a few months into FY21. As a result, there is no opportunity for advocacy for new trauma-informed appropriations at this time. (You will notice, however, that the email template for your Representative includes a “thank you” to the House for including trauma provisions in the appropriations bill the House passed on July 31. It is important to acknowledge that bill, even if it won’t be moving right now.) When Congress finally takes up the FY21 appropriations bills, most likely in December, we will be back to asking you to advocate for the Campaign’s trauma-informed appropriations priorities. Right now, however, the focus of this alert is solely on trauma-informed programs in the next COVID bill that Congress may be considering in September.

Steps to take:

1. Prepare an example(s) or story.

Think of an example(s) or story that illustrates the traumatic impact the pandemic is causing in your community/population you serve and/or state. These stories will be of the greatest importance to them. You may find examples or stories from within your organization, by talking with public agency staff, the news, etc. If you need help or further guidance on this, please email info@traumacampaign.org.

2. Communicate with your staff point of contact in both of your U.S. Senate offices and your House of Representative’s Office.

Using the template emails on pages 3 and 5, email the staffers with whom you have developed a relationship in each of your U.S. Senate and House offices. *The emails will be different for House and Senate as they are at different stages of the legislative process.*

If you have a point of contact but have never personally introduced yourself, please do your best to have a conversation with that staff person to introduce yourself, your organization or network, and the reasons you believe in applying the science of trauma and resilience to federal policy.

If you haven’t already identified a point of contact, call the main line of each of your U.S. Senators’ offices and for your Representative in the House, then ask for the name and contact information for the staffer who works on child and family, trauma, and/or mental health policy. This is the person you want to develop a relationship and open line of communication with. **As an individual constituent, you have two U.S. Senators and one Member of the House of Representatives.** To identify your two U.S. Senators, as well as links to their contact information and website, follow this link: [Find Your U.S. Senator](#). If you need to find out who your House Member is, follow this link: [Find Your Congressperson](#).

If you need help or further guidance on this, please email info@traumacampaign.org.

3. Use Campaign email templates to make your outreach easy.

There is a template to reach Senators on the next page (page 3), and a different template on page 5 to reach Representatives. Feel free to customize the template.

Template Email to Your Senators:

If this is your first communication with one or both of your Senators' office(s), 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 Senator [INSERT LAST NAME]:

I am writing as your constituent to urge you to be a champion for responding 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].

As you consider additional legislation related to the COVID pandemic I [IF YOU ARE PART OF A COALITION/ORGANIZATION, INCLUDE THAT INFORMATION HERE] am asking you to include funding for programs and approaches that are specifically intended to equip communities to stabilize child and family well-being as they are impacted by the traumatic effects of the pandemic.

The uncertainty, 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.

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

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 mitigate the negative impacts of overwhelming stress and help them thrive now and beyond the pandemic.

As you consider additional legislative responses to the pandemic, children and families in [INSERT YOUR STATE] need you to:

1. **Equip communities and community-based entities, such as schools and early education settings, to:**
 - raise awareness about trauma and its effects;
 - recognize and respond to trauma, and;
 - fully leverage flexible federal funds to ensure the best outcomes.
- a. **Increase funding for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) by at least \$10 million.** This will support efforts to bring much-needed trauma-informed supports to more communities.
- b. **Increase funding for Project AWARE by at least \$100 million.** Project AWARE assists schools [include an example from your state if applicable] to implement trauma-informed initiatives and mental health supports for students

- c. **Fund additional grants to local education agencies and Head Start providers.** P.L. 115-271 (The SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act) created new grants to expand evidence-based trauma support services in schools. The law authorizes the Secretary of Education to make grants to link educational agencies with mental health systems to increase student access to services. We urge you to include \$50 million for these grants to help mitigate the impact of trauma that many of our students are enduring as a result of the pandemic.
2. **Include provisions in the next COVID package to allow federal funds to be spent on addressing trauma and building resiliency, and offer federal-level coordination in support of the use of those funds.**
 - a. **Clarify that child care and K-12 education stabilization can be used for trauma-informed supports.** The funds appropriated for early childhood and K-12 educational settings should allow for implementing trauma-informed protocols and programs to address the increased level of stress and trauma caused by the pandemic, which can disrupt learning for children and lead to disruptive behavior in classrooms if care and education settings are not prepared. Trauma-informed approaches are needed and useful in both physical and virtual classrooms.
 - b. **Provide \$1 million to fund the Federal Interagency Task Force on child trauma.** Section 7132 of P.L. 115-271 (SUPPORT Act) created an Interagency Task Force on Trauma-Informed Care that was directed to identify, evaluate, and make recommendations around the most effective programs and ways in which Federal agencies can better coordinate to improve the Federal response to families impacted by substance use disorders and other forms of trauma. With additional federal resources, including many flexible funding streams, flowing into states and communities, the work of the Task Force is more important than ever.
 - c. **Include and fund Section 101 of the bipartisan RISE from Trauma Act (S. 1770)** This provision would establish local-based coordinating bodies to address the impact of stress and trauma in communities.
 - d. **Support flexible funding for school districts to support the social-emotional needs of children,** including through the provision of trauma-informed supports and interventions.

Our country has faced unexpected tragedies before, but few, if any, have been so far reaching and touched so many so suddenly. For children, we know many of the consequences of what's happening now will not be immediately visible, but they could be lifelong if we don't act. By addressing trauma now, and preventing further trauma and violence through strategies that strengthen families and communities and promote social connection and well-being, we can ensure that our children will be able to thrive and succeed once the physical health crisis is contained.

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

I am happy to answer any questions you may have about these recommendations and welcome the opportunity to work with you to more fully understand the value they have for the children and families in our state. Please feel free to contact me at [INSERT YOUR EMAIL and PHONE NUMBER].

Sincerely,

Template Email to Your Representative:

Dear Representative [INSERT LAST NAME]:

I am writing as your constituent to urge you to be a champion for responding 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].

I wanted to thank you for House passage of the FY 2021 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bill on July 31st. This legislation included a number of critical investments in trauma-informed supports and interventions for children and families. I hope I can count on you to continue to support these provisions in ongoing negotiations with the Senate.

As the House continues negotiations with the Senate on additional legislation related to the COVID pandemic, I [IF YOU ARE PART OF A COALITION/ORGANIZATION, INCLUDE THAT INFORMATION HERE] am asking you to include funding for programs and approaches that are specifically intended to equip communities to stabilize child and family well-being as they are impacted by the traumatic effects of the pandemic.

The uncertainty, 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.

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

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 mitigate the negative impacts of overwhelming stress and help them thrive now and beyond the pandemic.

As you consider FY 21 Appropriations as well as additional legislative responses to the pandemic, children and families in [INSERT YOUR STATE] need you to:

1. Increase funding for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) by at least \$10 million. This will support efforts to bring much-needed trauma-informed supports to more communities.

2. Increase funding for Project AWARE by at least \$100 million. Project AWARE assists schools [include an example from your state if applicable] to implement trauma-informed initiatives and mental health supports for students .
3. Fund additional grants to local education agencies and Head Start providers. P.L. 115-271 (The SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act) created new grants to expand evidence-based trauma support services in schools. The law authorizes the Secretary of Education to make grants to link educational agencies with mental health systems to increase student access to services. We urge you to include \$50 million for these grants to help mitigate the impact of trauma that many of our students are enduring as a result of the pandemic.
4. Provide \$1 million to fund the Federal Interagency Task Force on child trauma. Section 7132 of P.L. 115-271 (SUPPORT Act) created an Interagency Task Force on Trauma-Informed Care that was directed to identify, evaluate, and make recommendations around the most effective programs and ways in which Federal agencies can better coordinate to improve the Federal response to families impacted by substance use disorders and other forms of trauma. With additional federal resources, including many flexible funding streams, flowing into states and communities, the work of the Task Force is more important than ever.
5. Include and fund Section 101 of the bipartisan RISE from Trauma Act (S. 1770) which would establish local-based coordinating bodies to address the impact of stress and trauma in communities.

Many of these provisions were included in the HEROES Act (HR 6800). I appreciate the House's effort to pass that legislation and I hope you will continue to support their inclusion in a final negotiated package.

Our country has faced unexpected tragedies before, but few, if any, have been so far reaching and touched so many so suddenly. For children, we know many of the consequences of what's happening now will not be immediately visible, but they could be lifelong if we don't act. By addressing trauma now, and preventing further trauma and violence through strategies that strengthen families and communities and promote social connection and well-being, we can ensure that our children will be able to thrive and succeed once the physical health crisis is contained.

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