

[Over 160 Organizations Urge Congress to Promptly Enact the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act](#)

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker United States House of Representatives
2468 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader United States House of Representatives
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

February 5, 2024

Re: Request to Enact the *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* this Congress

To: Majority Leader Schumer, House Speaker Johnson, and Minority Leaders McConnell and Jeffries:

The International Transformational Resilience Coalition, and the 160+ other organizations listed at the end of this letter, request that Congress enact HR 3073/S 1452, the bi-partisan [Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act of 2023](#) during this Congress. This urgently needed new legislation will expand our nation's approach to mental health by supporting and funding community-based initiatives that use a public health approach to build individual and community social, psychological, and emotional wellness and resilience to prevent and heal mental health, behavioral health, and psychosocial problems resulting from accelerating toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters.

The *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* was introduced by co-leads Representatives Paul Tonko (D-NY) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), along with original co-sponsors Don Bacon (R-NE), Mary Peltola (D-AK) and Kathy Castor (D-FL). They have since been joined by co-sponsors David Valadao (R-CA), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Morgan McGarvey (D-KY), Shri Thanedar (D-MI), Donald Davis (D-NC), David Trone (D-MD), Ann Kuster (D-NH), Troy Carter (D-LA), Haley Stevens (D-MI), Brittany Petterson (D-CO), Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Jerrold Nader (D-NY), Andrea Salinas (D-OR), Susan Wild (D-PA), Alma Adams (D-NC), Terri Sewell (D-AL), Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (MI At-Large), Melanie Ann Stansbury (D-NM), Gerald Connolly (D-VA), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D DC-At-Large), Jill Tokuda (D-HI), Josh Harder (D-CA), and Becca Balint (D-VT). A companion bill, S 1452, was introduced in the Senate by Senators Ed Markey (D-MA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI).

The *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* is urgently needed because mental health problems are at epidemic levels today nationwide and constitute a public health emergency. According to Mental Health America, in 2022 almost 20 percent of adults, or nearly 50 million Americans, experienced a diagnosed mental illness and 5 percent had a severe mental illness.

In addition, a 2022 CDC survey found that overall, 37 percent of students at public and private high schools reported poor mental health, including stress, anxiety, and depression. A poll by the American Psychiatric Association found that 53 percent of adults with children under 18 said they are concerned about the mental state of their children.

The historic heatwaves, droughts, wind, rain, and snowstorms, hurricanes, floods, wildfires, hazardous smoke events, and other emergencies and disasters the US is experiencing are aggravating these problems and creating many new ones. In 2021 more than 40 percent of Americans lived in a county that was impacted by a major disaster. The events can traumatize 20-40 percent of those who are directly impacted, 10-20 percent of disaster response workers, and 5-10 percent of the general population who are not directly affected but know someone who is or view the events from afar. Consequently, the number of people who experience a mental health problem as a result of a disaster often outweighs those with physical injuries by 40 to 1.

Although mental health services are essential, they do not prevent psychological and emotional distresses or traumas by strengthening the capacity for mental wellness and resilience. In addition, there will never be enough providers to assist all of the individuals who now experience mental health struggles. The number of people needing assistance will only grow as more toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters occur.

The only viable way to reduce today's epidemic of mental health struggles, and prevent future ones, is to actively engage communities in using a public health approach to strengthen the capacity for mental wellness and resilience among all residents for all types of toxic stresses, emergencies, and disasters. A public health approach focuses on the *entire population*, including but not limited to high-risk individuals and those with symptoms of pathology. It prioritizes *preventing* psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems before they occur, not merely treating them after they appear, and integrates mostly group and community-minded methods to *heal* traumas into the prevention methods. And it accomplishes this by strengthening *protective factors*—social support networks, trauma and resilience-informed knowledge and skills, local resources, and other assets—that enable residents to buffer themselves from the forces that undermine their wellness and resilience and find new meaning, purpose, and hope in adversities.

From the [Healthy and Resilient Communities Initiative](#) in North Carolina to [Peace4Tarpon](#) in Florida and the [Community Resilience Initiative](#) in Washington State, numerous community-based mental wellness and resilience building initiatives are underway throughout the U.S. They have shown that by engaging local residents and organizations in implementing a range of age and culturally-tailored strategies, community becomes medicine for psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems. The top problem almost all of the initiatives have struggled with, however, is securing start-up funds. This makes it very difficult for new initiatives to get organized. Many also struggle to secure ongoing operational funds, which diminishes their effectiveness or causes some to close. The support and funding provided by *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* will address these problems by providing both planning grants to enable local initiatives to get organized, and program grants to support the ongoing operations of community-based initiatives as well as a technical assistance program to help communities develop grant proposals and learn from each other.

For these reasons the organizations below that endorse the legislation, and the International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC), urge you to expand our nation's approach to preventing and healing mental health and psychosocial problems by enacting the *Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act* this year.

Thank you for considering this request.

Bob Doppelt
Coordinator
International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC)

Organizational Endorsers of the Community Mental Wellness and Resilience Act

International Transformational Resilience Coalition	The Resiliency Group
National Association of State Mental Health Directors	Community Resilience Initiative
National Alliance of Mental illness (NAMI)	Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative
American Psychiatric Association	Trauma Resource Institute
American Psychological Association	Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy & Practice
Mental Health America	Interfaith Power & Light
American Public Health Association	Climate Mental Health Network
National Association of Social Workers	New Leaf Counseling LLC
National Rural Health Association	San Francisco Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility
Illinois Association for Infant Mental Health	Whatcom Family & Community Network
Rural Opportunity Institute	International OCD Foundation
National Association of Regional Councils	UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health	Mental Health America of the Palm Beaches
National League for Nursing	American Family Therapy Academy, Inc.
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners	American Counseling Association
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work	Health Care Without Harm
National Association of Community Health Workers	Children's Environmental Health Network
Anxiety and Depression Association of America	Prevention Institute
Clinical Social Work Association	Peace4Tarpon
Save the Children	Start Early
National Federation of Families	Birch Bay-Blaine Thrives
American Association on Health and Disability	Physicians for Social Responsibility Maine Chapter
The Jed Foundation	The Resiliency Initiative
National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives	Beaver Hollow
International Society for Psychiatric Nurses	Metta Foundation
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry	Lieberman Group, Inc.
Alliance for Positive Health	Jen Johnson, MS, MFA, LCMHC
Rural Health Network of SCNY	NH Healthcare Workers for Climate Action
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health	Resilience Climbing
American Lung Association	Sabater Laboratory for Psychological Innovations Inc
Association of Clinicians for the Underserved (ACU)	Able-Differently
Congressional Research Institute for Social Work and Policy	Reaching Resiliency
National Association of School Psychologists	Michigan Clinicians for Climate Action
Psychotherapy Action Network	One Shared Spirit
Trauma & Resilience Initiative Inc.	Seneca County Community Schools
Unitarian Universalist Mental Health Network	Trauma Healing Project
NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals	Emory University's Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments	Visible Hands Collaborative
American Association on Health and Disability	The Children's Agenda
Clinical Social Work Association	American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare
National Compadres Network	Earthday.org
The Kennedy Forum	Climate Resilience Leadership, LLC

SolaVida
MUYUMPA - Centro de Formación en Terapia Comunitaria
Thinkwell, LLC.
Lieberman Group, Inc.
Win Climate
Climate Psychology Alliance - North America
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
Jennifer G. Gordon PhD PC
Organic Intelligence
The Blueford Group
Beaver Hollow
Trauma & Resilience Inc.
Climate Resilience Fund
Lakeshore Foundation
Glenn County Office of Education
Columbia Resilience
KLBRI
BasicNeeds US, Inc.
Vermont Climate and Health Alliance
CAN Climate Action Net
Climate Generation
Rising Communities (formerly Community Health Councils)
United Way of the Columbia Willamette
Truly Well
Resources for Resilience
Good Grief Network
Towson Therapy Group
Prevent Child Abuse New York
Family Focused Treatment Association
Resilience United
Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative
Committee for Children
Resilient Brunswick County
Inseparable
Afterschool Alliance
18th Street Arts Center
Indivisible ReSisters Walnut Creek
Trauma-informed Hampshire County

ecoAmerica
Post Carbon Institute
Futures Without Violence
Aloka Earth Room
Moms Clean Air Force
Finger Lakes Community Schools
350 Eugene
Climate Psychiatry Alliance
The Resilient Activist
Generation Up (GENup)
EcoInfluencer Academy
Trauma Informed Oregon
Climate Health Now
Generation Up (GENup)
RI International
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility
RIMYA Services
Our Climate
Community Resilience Research
Susanne Moser Research & Consulting
MENTOR Youth Development
The Family Focused Treatment Association
The Center for Mind-Body Medicine
Triple P America - Positive Parenting Program
100% Chaves County Initiative
Full Circle Florida, Inc.
Schools for Climate Action
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
Safer Together
Classic City Mindful Movement
ACEs Matter, Corp
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice
Youth and Women for Change in Eswatini
Future Focused Education
Resilient Colorado
Peace 'In It' Counseling
Futures Without Violence
Educational Sustainability Mobilization Inc.
SabaterLAB Foundation
Between the Waters