



September 13, 2021

The Honorable Bryan Steil
1526 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mark Pocan
1727 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ron Kind
1502 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gwen Moore
2252 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Scott Fitzgerald
1507 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Glenn Grothman
1427 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Tiffany
1719 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Gallagher
1230 Longworth House Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation,

On behalf of Children's Wisconsin (Children's), I write to request that you cosponsor the bipartisan Helping Kids Cope Act and Children's Mental Health Infrastructure Act (H.R. 4944/H.R. 4943). These bills will provide much-needed investments to address the mental health crisis facing kids and teens in Wisconsin and across the nation.

At Children's, we believe caring for a child's mental and behavioral health is just as important as caring for their physical health. That is why we announced a five-year initiative in 2019 to address the growing mental and behavioral health crisis facing Wisconsin kids. The crisis is significant with about one in five Wisconsin kids struggling with mental illness. Prior to the pandemic, we were experiencing alarming rates of mental health hospitalizations, suicide rates and depression among Wisconsin children and adolescents. The pandemic has hit children's well-being hard and directly, exacerbating what was already a growing national and state crisis. Our primary care offices and urgent care clinics continue to experience increases in the number and acuity of kids who present with primary and secondary mental and behavioral health complaints. Children's saw an 80% increase in referrals for mental and behavioral health care services in December of 2020 compared to December of 2019. Unfortunately, tracking what others are seeing across the country, we have also experienced a statistically significant increase in positive suicide screens in our emergency department since the pandemic began.

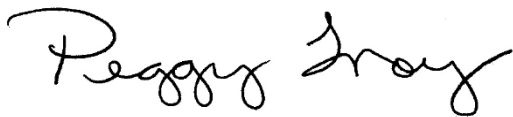
The demand for pediatric mental health services continues to outpace the availability of providers. For example, Children's current waitlist for outpatient therapy has more than 700 children on it with the longest wait being over 100 days. We are also seeing an increase, locally and nationally, in eating disorders, pain syndromes and reports of cases of long-haul symptoms of COVID-19 illness requiring the need to provide specialized, comprehensive medical and psychiatric care in inpatient and outpatient settings that simply do not yet exist in our community today.

Children's continues to work with the state, community partners and generous donors to establish programs and services to provide prevention and early intervention services, increase the number of and access to providers, and reduce the stigma that surrounds mental illness. However, our work and that of our pediatric partners is being accomplished within a national pediatric behavioral health infrastructure that is fragmented and has been inadequately supported for decades.

H.R. 4943 & H.R. 4944 aim to address these shortcomings by providing funding for innovative initiatives aimed at improving pediatric access to care and detecting kids' mental and behavioral health concerns sooner. These include efforts such as integrating behavioral health providers in primary care settings and school-based care, as well as investing in training and other strategies to increase the number of providers and care capacity across the continuum of care. These targeted investments will help accelerate the work that Children's and other providers are doing to meet the needs of kids and families.

Too many children in Wisconsin are struggling with unmet mental health needs and we must act urgently to increase capacity and improve access to care for kids and their families. Children's is committed to ensuring kids and teens get the care they need and these bills will help us do our part. Please stand with the kids in need of mental and behavioral health care and support H.R. 4943 and H.R. 4944.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peggy Inoué". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

President & CEO

Children's Wisconsin