



School Social Work Association of America

SSWAA 2022 Legislative Priorities

- I. **School-Based Mental Health Services:** The mental health needs of students have been growing for years, but the long-term impacts of the coronavirus pandemic have further exacerbated these challenges. Alarming high rates of mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety have left school-based mental health services personnel overburdened with higher caseloads, yet severe workforce shortages and tight budgets have left schools unable to expand these services quickly enough to meet demand.
- **Congressional Action Requested:**
 - Support the EDUCATORS for America (S 3360/HR 6205), Save Education Jobs Act (HR 542), and other legislation which provides school districts with the resources to hire and retain on-site school social workers and other qualified school-employed mental health professionals.
 - Support the Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools Act (S 1811/HR 3572) and the Mental Health Services for Students Act (S 1841/HR 721), which would provide funding and support for on-site mental health services for youth in schools nationwide.
 - Expand telehealth access temporarily for students who cannot return to in-person learning for public health reasons, but recognize that services administered by district-employed, school-based mental health services providers with familiarity with the individual community and student are more effective and should be prioritized.
 - Ensure that support for student mental health programs administered by school-employed mental health professionals is included in any comprehensive mental health reform legislation that is developed.
 - Recognize publicly that child and adolescent mental health legislation should be addressed as an urgent legislative priority in Congress.
- II. **Recognition for the School Social Work Profession:** School social workers are the vital link between the home, school, and community, and provide services to support students' academic and social success. They work with school administrators, teachers, students, and families, providing leadership in forming school discipline policies, mental health intervention, support services, academic success plans, and crisis management.
- **Congressional Action Requested:**
 - Ensure that legislation related to educators and school support staff includes explicit mention of school social workers.
 - Develop legislation which recognizes the importance of the school social work profession and the wide variety of roles we play in supporting students' academic, social, physical, and emotional needs.
 - Pass the School Social Work Act, which would provide funding and support for local school districts to increase and develop their school social work workforce.



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- Promote policies which address disproportionality and increase diversity within the school social work workforce.

III. **Federal Funding for Education:** Providing federal funding to support state and local education agencies is critical to ensuring that school social workers have the tools needed to do their jobs, and that students have equitable access to resources and opportunities.

- **Congressional Action Requested:**
 - Pass legislation which supports full funding of key programs such as ESSA Title I, ESSA Title IV-A, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Examples of bills that provide comprehensive education funding include the Keep Our PACT Act and the IDEA Full Funding Act.
 - Pass the FY2022 Appropriations bill, which is expected to provide significant increases in funding for K-12 education, as soon as possible so students and schools can receive the additional funding they need before next school year.

IV. **Student and Family Wellbeing:** It is the responsibility of school social workers to advocate for the students we serve, be it on the individual or Congressional level. Issues such as homelessness, hunger, inequitable opportunities, and harmful immigration policies have detrimentally impacted our students at an alarmingly increasing rate. Policies which promote housing and food security, pathways to citizenship, educational equity and racial justice would have a profoundly positive effect on students' ability to succeed.

- **Congressional Action Requested:**
 - Implement measures that support housing security, efforts for more affordable housing, and rental assistance.
 - Expand support and increase funding for school-provided meals in communities with food insecurity.
 - Pass the Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act (S 2125/HR 4011) and other legislation which fosters educational equity for all students through a social justice framework.
 - Protect the rights of LGBTQ+ students by passing legislation such as the Therapeutic Fraud Prevention Act (S 2242/HR 4146).
 - Create clear paths to citizenship for students with undocumented status, and end immigration policies that are detrimental to child and adolescent mental health.
 - Support legislation such as the School Shooting Safety and Preparedness Act (HR 5428) that develops programs and policies to ensure that students and staff are safe when at school.