



## **H.R. 3549 Comprehensive Mental Health in Schools Pilot Program Act of 2021** ***Rep. David Trone (MD-06)***

### **Why is this legislation needed?**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that from March through October of 2020, the proportion of children between the ages of 5 and 11 visiting an emergency department because of a mental health crisis climbed 24 percent compared to the same time period in 2019, and 31 percent for children between the ages of 12 and 17. The pandemic has worsened existing mental health issues for some students, and brought on wholly new issues for others. On top of that, experts agree that the full effects of increased loss, social isolation, uncertainty, and trauma may not manifest for years, and schools must be prepared to deal with this in a preventative, comprehensive, and long-term fashion.

### **How will this legislation solve the problem?**

The Comprehensive Mental Health in Schools Pilot Program Act of 2021 will fund pilot programs in primary and secondary schools that will allow them to establish and support comprehensive evidence-based, trauma-informed, mental and behavioral health prevention and intervention programs. This will help schools to mitigate current mental health issues while simultaneously preventing delayed manifestations of these issues as well.

### **What does the Comprehensive Mental Health in Schools Pilot Program Act of 2021 do?**

This legislation would direct the Secretary of Education to establish a pilot grant program to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive mental health services programs in elementary schools. It demonstrates the Importance of prioritizing the whole child, including academic, cognitive, social-emotional, identity development, and mental/physical health.

This will be done through a multi-tiered system of support model, with funds being used for evaluation of the child's needs, and implementation of universal support, targeted interventions, and intensive support. Key pieces of this model will include incorporating social-emotional learning into class instruction, while adding social-emotional learning into school culture, establishing trauma-informed and trauma-competent practices to support students and staff, in addition to evaluating basic student needs and promoting a safe home environment. The legislation also includes hiring school-based mental health professionals. Grants are awarded, on a competitive basis, for four consecutive academic years, with the possibility of renewal for another four consecutive academic years at the discretion of the Secretary. An evaluation will be done to understand whether the program was a success, whether it should be continued, and any lessons learned.

Ultimately, this will give schools the ability to measure outcomes with a focus on continuous improvement rather than just rewards or sanctions. This works to ensure more equitable access to high-quality learning environments where teaching of social and emotional learning skills is not just in stand-alone lessons. This is done using modern, evidence-based instructional materials, practices, programs, and resources. In the end, students have adults in their lives, both in and out of school, with understanding of behavioral health.