

# **U.S. Rep. Moore: Congresswoman Gwen Moore and Congresswoman Barbara Lee introduce legislation to increase access to school social workers to address growing need for school-based mental health services among young people**

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“Expanding access to mental health services will protect the health and wellbeing of our children, many of whom need this care right now. The pandemic created trying times for everyone, and children certainly felt the stress of it all. 75% percent of kids between the ages of 3-17 have been diagnosed with depression or anxiety. Unfortunately, most of these children aren’t receiving care for their mental health needs and too many schools are struggling to hire or retain the needed mental health professionals.

In his recent State of the Union Address, President Biden made clear that addressing the mental health needs in our community, including for our children is a priority for his administration. My bill would support that call and help us close gaps in care by helping schools hire and retain mental health professionals already serving young people every day: school social workers. These heroes help many students facing personal challenges and worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to help students and families.

My legislation with Rep. Barbara Lee would provide funding to hire more school

social workers to ensure every child is supported when they need it most. By investing in this dedicated workforce of school based social work professionals, we invest in our children's present and their future success," said **Congresswoman Moore**.

"Many may not be aware that before I came to Congress, I was a social worker—meaning I know firsthand the tremendous impact that social workers can have on a young person's mental health. In schools particularly, social workers are a vital part of the support system for vulnerable students, helping them overcome difficulties at home or in the community to thrive in school. I am proud to introduce the School Social Workers Improving Student Success Act alongside Rep. Moore and express my deepest gratitude to social workers across America," said **Congresswoman Lee**.

"As long-time school social workers, social work researchers, and Co-Chairs of the Society for Social Work and Research's School Social Work and School-Based Research Special Interest Group, we unequivocally and universally support amending the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to provide grants to hire and retain school social workers. The act, cited as the School Social Workers Improving Student Services Act will increase access to mental health and other student support services and will assure that underserved students and underserved schools will receive the mental health and student support services needed for school success. We represent a group of school social work researchers who complete research in schools nationally and have firsthand knowledge of the benefits of having social workers in schools. Social workers in schools work directly with youth struggling with social, emotional, and behavioral health problems to improve their success in school settings. Social workers are important school mental health professionals who also serve to solve everyday crisis and to meet the basic needs of students by becoming a bridge to families and community resources. These times are unprecedented, youth in schools are experiencing an epidemic in depression, suicide, substance use, and other challenging behaviors that are indicators of mental health needs. Families are challenged by grief from the death of loved ones from COVID-19, the loss of their jobs, food insecurity, and the displacement from stable housing. This coupled with the loss of learning during the pandemic signals the need to increase student support services. There are unprecedented needs in the local community schools across our country, and educators cannot do it alone. The School Social Workers Improving Student Services Act is a long overdue opportunity to expand important and needed student support

services in school settings across the United States, and we thank the advocates of this bill, our professional organizations who have supported it, and the members of Congress who support this work to help youths who are struggling with mental health concerns,” said **Dr. Aaron Thompson and Dr. Cynthia Franklin, Co-Chairs of the Society for Social Work and Research’s School Social Work and School-Based Research Special Interest Group.**

“The bill is critical since it will provide needed school social workers to major parts of the country that have no such services. Connecting the school and community, supporting families and educators with needed resources, mental health services, and creating welcoming school environments are the cornerstone of what our country needs now—this is what school social workers do. Creating the first technical assistance center with a social work perspective -honoring the community, self-empowerment, local voice, culturally responsive intervention, and specific needs of local schools is very needed. This technical assistance provided will be the first of its kind and be transformational in helping our nation’s schools and communities,” said **Ron Avi Astor, Ph.D., Professor, Crump Chair in Social Welfare Luskin School of Public Affairs School of Education and Information Studies UCLA**

“This bill is a landmark opportunity to increase the reach and power of school social workers in promoting mental health and wellness for youth and communities around the nation. We know that school social workers are critical to keeping students safe and thriving in school. Now is the time to put our knowledge into policy action,” said **Dr. Laura S. Abrams, Professor and Chair, UCLA Luskin Social Welfare Member, AASWSW**

“I strongly endorse this bill. It is needed to rapidly advance access to and build capacity for school social work services at a crucial time,” said **Susan Stone, Ph.D. Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, Professor & Catherine Mary and Eileen Clare Hutto Chair for Social Services in Public Education, School of Social Welfare, University of California at Berkeley Member of AASWSW**

“The School Social Work Association of America extends our gratitude to Congresswoman Moore and Congresswoman Lee for their leadership in introducing the School Social Workers Improving Student Success Act. School social workers are specialized mental health professionals who serve as the vital link between the school, home, and community. We play a critical role in addressing student mental, academic, and social wellbeing by providing direct and indirect services and

connecting students to community support. This bill would ensure schools have the resources they need to hire and retain school social workers to address student needs,” said **Christy McCoy, President, and Rebecca Oliver, Executive Director, School Social Work Association of America.**

*The National Association of Social Workers, the School Social Work Association of America, and the American Council for School Social Work recommend one school social worker for every 250 students, and one school social worker for every 50 students in high-need schools, but the national average is one social worker for every 2,106 students. This legislation will address the urgent need for supportive and mental health care services for children.*

*Additional original cosponsors of the legislation are Rep. Sylvia Garcia, Rep. Danny Davis, Rep. Betty McCollum, Rep. David N. Cicilline, Rep. Karen Bass, and Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton.*