

April 18, 2022

The Honorable Patricia Murray
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bobby Scott
House Committee on Education & Labor
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
House Committee on Education & Labor
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Senate Committee on Finance
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Senate Committee on Finance
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Members of the 117th Congress:

On behalf of the [Council of Graduate Schools \(CGS\)](#), I write to address the important issue of graduate student mental health and to encourage Members of the 117th Congress to make the mental health and wellbeing of graduate students and their families a high priority when developing mental health legislation. As a national organization dedicated to advancing education and research, CGS and our member institutions are committed to providing educational environments that support the whole student. In our view, “students are most likely to succeed when graduate programs recognize that physical, social, and emotional experiences – in addition to academics – are important aspects of any student’s life.”¹ We encourage Congress to keep U.S. graduate schools and the millions of students we educate a high priority when considering legislation to fund mental health programs.

The nation’s graduate schools serve two important and distinctive roles in the mental health arena. First, graduate schools provide a refuge for graduate students and their families; a place where they can succeed academically and find the necessary resources and support to alleviate undue stress. Second, graduate schools educate and train the mental health professionals needed to provide health care services and support to the people in our communities.

Supporting Graduate Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

Graduate student mental health and wellbeing continues to be a pressing priority for CGS and our member-institutions. Over the last ten years, there has been mounting evidence that graduate students are facing increasing levels of stress and anxiety. As you might expect, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated mental health stressors for graduate students and their families. In April 2021, CGS and The

¹ Supporting Graduate Student Mental Health and Wellbeing: Evidence-Informed Recommendations For The Graduate Community, April 2021, [CGS_JED_Grad-Student-Mental-Health-Report-1.pdf \(cgsnet.org\)](#)

JED Foundation released the report titled, “Supporting Graduate Student Mental Health and Wellbeing: Evidence-Informed Recommendations for the Graduate Community.” The [executive summary](#) and [full report](#) provide valuable information concerning the need for access to mental health services for graduate students, as well as needed wrap-around services such as childcare, food security, housing, and respite for those serving as caregivers. **The report makes important recommendations to university presidents, provosts, and other senior leaders, including:**

- Ensuring that campus strategic plans regarding mental health and wellbeing address the unique needs of graduate students.
- Creating a series of university-wide campus wellness days, campaigns, and events.
- Prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion, and creating campus spaces to acknowledge and discuss challenges and crises experienced directly by minority graduate students.

The report also makes recommendations for graduate deans, including:

- Providing training on graduate student mental health and wellbeing in orientations held for new graduate faculty and directors of graduate programs.
- Review and revise, where appropriate, graduate student mental health leave policies that may negatively impact students, doing so in conjunction with the graduate faculty senate or other shared governance bodies.
- Creating a source of funding to support graduate student organizations planning wellness days, mental health campaigns, and events.

In addition to making recommendations for graduate students, the report makes the following recommendations for federal funding agencies:

- Review how current practices for evaluating the impact of research funding may exacerbate hyper-competitiveness and graduate faculty, postdoctoral researchers, and graduate student stress.
- Provide support for research to better understand graduate student mental health and wellbeing, especially challenges and barriers experienced by underrepresented and underserved groups of graduate students.

Recently CGS joined a group of higher education associations and mental health advocates in sending a [letter](#) to Capitol Hill on the importance of mental health care for all postsecondary education students. The letter calls for the expansion of the Garrett Lee Smith (GLS) Campus Suicide Prevention Grant. As stated in the letter, the GLS Grant program is currently funded at \$7 million and only a handful of institutions compete for funding. The letter goes on to say, “the scope and scale of the mental health crisis among college students will require far more support than the federal government provides and will require the federal government to deliver support to institutions and students in a timely, flexible manner.” CGS agrees with this viewpoint, and strongly encourages Congress to expand the GLS program and consider the needs of graduate students and their families when reevaluating this program. The letter also calls for the Public Health Services Act and the Higher Education Act to be updated to support holistic and evidence-based practices to meet students’ mental health needs. Again, CGS concurs with this viewpoint and strongly encourages the mental health and wellbeing of the graduate student community to be a part of this discussion during future consideration of both pieces of legislation.

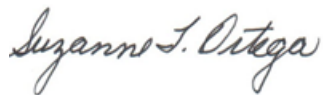
Graduate Schools: Educating and Training the Mental Health Care Workforce

CGS member-institutions and other graduate schools across the country are essential to the education, training, and career development of the nation's mental health care workforce. As you know, the mental health field consists of a wide range of sub-fields of study, including counseling for addiction and substance abuse; behavioral disorders; pediatric mental health; marriage and family therapy; psychology and neuroscience; school counselors; social work – all working in areas that broadly serve U.S. public and private sectors. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data, healthcare will be one of the fastest-growing industries from 2019-2029. More specifically, mental health counselors in the areas of substance abuse and behavioral disorders are projected to grow by 25 percent from 2019-2029. Despite this projected growth in mental health care professionals, the need for mental health care services continues to grow due to the ongoing pandemic and the stress of daily life. As a result, the graduate education community will continue to educate and train the next generation of mental health professionals to meet the needs of the people in our nation. However, we need Congress to make the education and training of mental health professionals a priority through the introduction and passage of relevant legislation.

Conclusion

CGS commends the abovementioned CGS/JED Foundation report to your attention and welcomes the opportunity to meet with you and other Members of Congress to discuss critical and time sensitive issues of graduate student mental health. We also strongly encourage Congress to consider holding hearings to discuss the issue of mental health and wellbeing at the nation's institutions of higher education. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Amy Scott at amscott@cgs.nche.edu or Nick Cox at ncox@cgs.nche.edu.

Sincerely,



Suzanne T. Ortega
President

Cc:
House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Health Subcommittee Members
Congressional Mental Health Caucus
The Bipartisan Addiction and Mental Health Task Force

AFFILIATES

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of Southern
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