November 5, 2021

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
United States Senate
520 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chris Murphy
United States Senate
136 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cassidy and Senator Murphy,

On behalf of Nemours Children's Health, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on your recent request for stakeholder input on mental health and substance use disorder programs and new policy ideas. We appreciate your leadership on these critical issues and your continued commitment to improving access to mental health supports and services. As you consider program improvements and other policy options, **we urge you to recognize the unique needs of children, adolescents and young people and to promote prevention, early intervention and tailored support to address their needs**.

ABOUT NEMOURS CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Nemours Children's Health is one of the nation's largest multistate pediatric health systems, including two free-standing children's hospitals and a network of nearly 75 primary and specialty care practices. Nemours Children's seeks to transform the health of children by adopting a holistic health model that utilizes innovative, safe, and high-quality care, while also caring for the health of the whole child beyond medicine. Nemours Children's also powers the world's most-visited website for information on the health of children and teens, KidsHealth.org.

The Nemours Foundation, established through the legacy and philanthropy of Alfred I. duPont, provides pediatric clinical care, research, education, advocacy, and prevention programs to the children, families and communities it serves.

THE ISSUE

Children are experiencing a significant mental health crisis exacerbated by the stressors of the pandemic. Children's hospitals serve as a vital safety net for all children across the country regardless of insurance status, including those who are uninsured, underinsured and enrolled in Medicaid. Medicaid is the single largest health insurer for children in the U.S. and serves as the backbone of children's health

NEMOURS CHILDREN'S HEALTH

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Workforce and Pediatric Capacity

An insufficient supply of pediatric mental health professionals across a wide array of disciplines causes delays in access to treatment for children's mental health conditions across the continuum of care. There are approximately 8,300 practicing child and adolescent psychiatrists in the U.S..[9] Additionally, there only 5.4 clinical child and adolescent psychologists per 100,000 children.[10] The current workforce is strained under the stress of the mental health crisis faced by children, and ongoing challenges associated with COVID-19 and provider burnout. **It is essential that any mental health legislation address the current crisis in pediatric mental health care capacity.**

There is an opportunity to ensure that workforce development programs support a broad base of provider types, including MEB specialists, primary care physicians, developmental and behavioral pediatricians, nurses, social workers, community health workers, and others. Developing this capacity and integrating more providers into the MEB care model would help address the overall provider shortage by promoting identification of concerns and referrals from a variety of providers.

Furthermore, there is a growing gap between federal investments in physician training for the adult population and children. The Children's Hospitals Graduate Medical Education Program (CHGME) is a vital investment in our nation's pediatric workforce, supporting more than 7,000 pediatric residents annually. It supports training of front-line providers, such as pediatricians and child and adolescent psychiatrists, who play critical roles in identifying and treating mental health needs of children and youth.

The high cost of education is another contributing factor to the existing provider shortage. Students who graduate with psychology doctorates have a median student loan debt of $82,000.[11] Those who attain the necessary education report delays in saving for the future (73%), planning for retirement (67%), purchasing a home (57%), having children (46%), and other major life events.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

We strongly recommend that Congress:

- **Support**

the training, including child and adolescent psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, psychologists, advanced practice nurses, family therapists, social workers,

psychiatric hospital or similar setting. Even more striking, we expect to have nearly three times as many total patient days requiring a one-on-one

challenges strain the social safety net and place unnecessary burden on those we seek to serve. Over the past few years, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and HHS have taken significant steps to improve interoperability and exchange of health data. Yet, public health entities, social service organizations, and community-based organizations have not benefitted from the same level of

nEMBlr(y) y y y0 Tw 2.. (0 Tw2(y)071 0 2 (8b)-19.33.016 .)7uTJooyedt4.rand

- **Pass the Temporary Reciprocity to Ensure Access to Treatment (TREAT) Act (S.168/H.R.708),** which would provide temporary licensing reciprocity for health care professionals for any type of services provided, within their scope of practice, to a patient located in another state during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Work with CMS to encourage states to develop regional licensure reciprocity

NEMOURS
CHILDREN'S HEALTH