

March 28, 2011

The Honorable Grace Napolitano
U.S. House of Representatives
1610 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Napolitano,

It is with great pleasure that I offer support from the Arizona State University College of Nursing & Health Innovation for your bill *Mental Health in Schools Act of 2011*. We know that one out of 4 children suffer from mental health problems, and less than 25% of them receive any treatment. Mental health disorders in children are now as common as fractures. Your proposed legislation is comprehensive and much needed, as the nation typically only turns its focus to mental health issues when tragedy strikes, such as what we recently experienced in Arizona.

Many primary care providers do not screen for mental health issues, in large part because they do not know how to treat them or do not have systems in place to deal with them. The integration of physical and mental healthcare in primary care and the provision of mental healthcare in school settings, as you propose, are good examples of how we can fully care for our children and adolescents. Your bill recognizes that childhood is the foundation for a healthy adulthood and that we must place an emphasis on prevention and early intervention. If our children are not healthy, we will substantially pay for it later in adulthood not only with mental health illnesses, but also chronic physical conditions including eating disorders and poor physical activity, as well as dysfunctional family relationships and lost work productivity, which have exorbitant healthcare and societal costs.

I offer my expertise as a dually trained pediatric nurse practitioner and psychiatric/mental health nurse practitioner to work with you to help advance this bill and other policies that increase the screening and treatment of mental illness among our America's children and young adults. Thank you for your continued leadership on mental health issues.

Warm regards,



Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, PhD, RN, CPNP/PMHNP, FNAP, FAAN
Dean and Distinguished Foundation Professor in Nursing

BM/lv

cc: Ane Romero