

July 15, 2019

The Honorable Richard Durbin
U.S. Senate
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Durbin,

Thank you for your leadership to push for comprehensive trauma-informed workforce training and improved community resources for families and children affected by trauma. The RISE from Trauma Act you have sponsored will not only help our children heal but also lay the groundwork for the prevention and mitigation of adverse childhood experiences that push children into the juvenile justice system where their traumas are compounded and worsened. Children's exposure to adverse childhood events (ACEs) is now well-documented both in its extent and in its disparate impacts on children growing up in communities of color, low-income communities and communities that register high rates of social isolation and violence.

We write with experience: Strategies for Youth, (<http://strategiesforyouth.org/>) is a policy and training organization dedicated to improving police/youth interactions through community engagement, police training, outreach programs for youth, and proactive use of multi-disciplinary approaches to problem solve and build relationships between police and youth. A key component of our *Policing the Teen Brain* training is a focus on teaching officers how to recognize and respond effectively to trauma. In addition, in recognition of the role trauma plays as a risk factor for juvenile justice system involvement SFY has created a four-part *Trauma Jeopardy* game that helps youth learn to recognize sources of trauma in their own lives and how to self-regulate and overcome ACEs. We've enclosed some of our training and program materials.

Many police officers, school administrators, teachers and others who work with youth are not trained to recognize trauma in children. Exposure to trauma—by dint of being a victim or witnessing victimization (e.g. domestic or community violence) is increasingly accepted as a risk factor for aggression and juvenile justice system involvement. It thus should be no surprise that communities with the highest rates of violence are those in which traumatized youth also experience the highest rates of arrest and incarceration.

For these reasons, trauma-informed workforces and diversity training are essential to reducing disproportionate minority contact and poor childrens' entry into the juvenile justice system. The bills' proposed allocation of resources to train adults working with

youth in hospitals and schools is vital to keeping these kids safe. We believe the absence of such training for law enforcement is a major cause for “arresting distress” of youth expressing traumatized responses to events about which they feel powerless and which no adults are helping them navigate.

We routinely see how effective alternative practices to suspension and expulsion are in order to keep traumatized students from being removed from the learning environment. Trauma experienced during childhood and adolescence already has tremendous implications on brain maturation and social, emotional, and physical problems--keeping youth in school and out of the juvenile justice system increases their chances of success.

A nonpartisan initiative begun under President Obama’s Administration, *Defending Childhood* (<https://www.justice.gov/archives/defendingchildhood>), created policy recommendations regarding the impact of trauma on American children, systems and economy. The groundwork set forth in its 2012 report would be strengthened and reaffirmed with the enactment of S. 1770/H.R. 3180.

Thank you for taking the initiative to help protect our youth. Investment in our youth will leave beneficial effects on our society for generations to come, reduce violence and racial inequity in our neighborhoods, and keep children out of the juvenile justice system. Please count on our support as you press for the enactment of this important legislation.

Very truly yours,

Lisa Thurau,
Executive Director