

Supporting Mental Health for Military Children Act of 2023

Our nation's young people are facing an unprecedented mental health crisis. An estimated 49.5% of American adolescents have had a mental health disorder at some point in their lives, with 50% of all lifetime mental illnesses beginning by age 14 and 75% by age 24.

While these numbers are already staggering, military children are at even greater risk of mental/behavioral health problems than the general population given their unique vulnerability to Adverse Childhood Experiences. As such, early screening and treatment are essential to decreasing the risk of suicide and improving management of and recovery from mental health conditions.

In an effort to address military children's unique vulnerability to adverse childhood experiences, and the skyrocketing rates of mental health and behavioral conditions amongst today's youth, **the "Supporting Mental Health for Military Children Act" would establish a pilot program to conduct routine mental health check-ups in Department of Defense Schools.**

Ubiquitous mental health screening and education protocols, offered by 55% of U.S. public schools in 2019-2022, are [well-tested](#), relatively low-resource, and high-impact ways to swiftly diagnose and treat mental health conditions amongst youth. The [expected benefits](#) are numerous, including:

1. ***Awareness.*** Awareness-building reduces stigma of mental/behavioral health conditions amongst military youth, normalizing mental health as just one additional dimension of overall health.
2. ***Early Detection and Treatment.*** Early detection and treatment of mental health disorders is shown to improve efficacy of treatment, giving students more time to develop strategies.
3. ***Decrease disparities.*** By rolling out this program, students of all socio-economic backgrounds would have access to the same mental health diagnosis/treatment, reducing disparities in who receives support.
4. ***Leadership.*** This program would serve as an example for non-DODEA school systems, potentially inspiring similar programs across the U.S.

Early screening and treatment are essential to decreasing the risk of suicide and improving long-term management of and recovery from mental health conditions. We must provide our DOD schools with this critical program for supporting our children and addressing the crisis in youth mental health.