January 18, 2017

Katie M. Dempsey

Georgia Representative

811 Highland Avenue

Rome, GA 30161

Dear Georgia House Representative Katie Dempsey,

I hope this email finds you well. We at the Georgia Association of School Psychologists (<http://gaspnet.org/>) wanted to reach out to and congratulate you and the House Study Committee on Children’s Mental Health for your important work last session. In reviewing the final report and recommendations put forth by your committee, we whole-heartedly support your findings and hope you will move forward in introducing legislation in the next session(s) to ensure school nurses and mental health professionals are made more accessible in all of Georgia’s schools, school climate training is expanded, and that there are improved budgeting processes across agencies so that the safety nets for Georgia’s children are strengthened. As school psychologists working in the public schools, we are uniquely trained to provide individual, group, and systems-level mental health services. As such, we would like to offer our full support at this time.

Students are coming into our school buildings with greater health needs than ever before. As school psychologists, we have observed and reported on the steady increase of low income students in Georgia and across the nation, who now make up a new majority of our students enrolled in our public schools. Many of these students lack basic physical and mental health care.

However, research tells us this is not just a health issue, this is an educational one as well, with teaching and learning dependent upon students having received basic dental, eye, ear, and mental health support so that they can perform on grade level and continue to progress academically. Trauma and the impacts of poverty are significant barriers to success for many students that school psychologists in particular could help address in our highest need communities in the state. The recommendations your committee made were forward thinking and, in many ways, could help prevent so many other challenges our schools face, potentially lowering the retention rates, drop-out rates, absenteeism rates, and the over-identification of students with disabilities in the state, to name just a few.

We recommend implementation of the National Association of School Psychologists’ Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services (<https://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/nasp-practice-model>) as a central strategy for achieving our children’s mental health goals, but the large discrepancy between NASP’s recommended ratio of 500-700 students per school psychologist and Georgia’s current ratio of 2400:1 needs to be addressed. In any case, we absolutely want to be part of the solution and therefore kindly request that our profession is represented on any advisory committees moving forward. I have cc'ed my local representative so that all are aware of our ability and desire to help with this important cause. Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

Susan D. Bryant, Ed.S.

President, 2016-17

Georgia Association of School Psychologists