

Committee on Education and Workforce

Member Day Hearing | December 1, 2023

TESTIMONY OF REPRESENTATIVE BRIAN K. FITZPATRICK

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this Member Day hearing and providing me with the opportunity to share the concerns of my constituents.

The mental health crisis facing our nation, specifically among our school-age children, requires action by this Congress. Over the last decade, cases of anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders have dramatically increased among American youth. It is estimated that over 38% percent of America's school students do not have adequate access to comprehensive mental health resources. The combination of increased need for mental health resources in schools, and the national shortage of professionals in this field has exacerbated this crisis.

As a Co-Chair of the Bipartisan Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Task Force, I am proud to support efforts that will directly address the needs of our students. That is why I introduced H.R. 3228, the *Mental Health in Schools Excellence Program Act*. This bipartisan bill will authorize the Department of Education to partner with higher education institutions to assist in covering costs of students pursuing careers as school psychologists, counselors, and social workers. Strengthening the workforce pipeline will increase access to comprehensive mental health resources for students to ensure that our kids have the resources they need to flourish. I encourage all of my colleagues on this committee to join me in addressing this mental health crisis among our students by working to provide sufficient resources to ensure that no student is left to fight on their own.

I would also like to address the importance of strengthening and modernizing our nation's nutrition programs supporting our children, specifically the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. The WIC program is a crucial source of nutrition for low-income women, nursing mothers, infants, and children, and one of the most successful and impactful initiatives that the federal government operates. As a result of the global pandemic, the WIC program had to find new ways to offer services and ensure that participants' needs were met. In this new remote environment, it became clear that there had to be ways to modernize the program. I am proud to lead H.R. 2424, the *MODERN WIC Act*, to streamline access to WIC benefits. This bipartisan bill will provide remote service options for WIC applicants and participants. Modernizing this process will allow more families to receive and utilize benefits and ensure our children have a healthy start to life. I urge my colleagues to continue to support commonsense initiatives that will modernize our bureaucracy in an effort to support American families.

Finally, I would like to address the issue of increasing educational opportunities in schools and prioritizing out-of-school time (OST) programs. Investing in a robust and skilled workforce begins with investing in our children. H.R. 3416, the *Youth Workforce Readiness Act*, would

establish a grant program for eligible after-school programs to equip students with the skills to succeed in the workforce. Expanding leadership development programs, financial literacy lessons, and mentorship opportunities which are essential parts of many OST programs will better prepare our next generation. I would like to insert into the record, a letter from the Boys & Girls Clubs of America regarding their support of the *Youth Workforce Readiness Act*.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify today.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Committee and all my colleagues on common-ground, common-sense solutions to education and workforce issues in this 118th Congress.