

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-2107

March 21, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

I write seeking your partnership and leadership to confront our nation's growing trauma crisis. Your administration has inherited a nation in the midst of multiple, overlapping crises, and your continued plans for recovery must address the personal and collective trauma that communities across the country continue to face daily. You are uniquely positioned to address the trauma crisis and help our nation heal.

The trauma crisis in our communities is not new, but it has been compounded by the global pandemic, economic crisis, and negligence of the previous Administration. The people who call this nation home are struggling. A Centers for Disease Control survey conducted before the crisis in 25 states found 1 in 6 adults have experienced four or more types of adverse childhood experiences in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> In the era of COVID, overdose deaths have accelerated<sup>2</sup>, and over 50 percent of adults report that their mental health has been negatively impacted by worry and stress brought on by the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> The CDC has also reported that throughout the pandemic, hospitals across the country have seen a rise in mental health-related emergency rooms visits among youth.<sup>4</sup>

I have seen firsthand the magnitude of this crisis. As a Boston City Councilor, I convened the first ever listening-only session in the City of Boston on trauma. The pain I felt in that room years ago inspired me to partner with late Congressman and former Oversight Committee Chairman Elijah Cummings to hold the first ever series of hearings dedicated to combatting childhood trauma. Too many communities are subject to a consistent barrage of death, disparity, and policy violence, and yet to date their trauma has not been met with significant federal action.

You have a unique opportunity to prioritize programs and funding that address the scale of this challenge and acknowledge the role trauma-informed approaches must play in healing our nation. It is incumbent on us as policymakers to recognize that a business-as-usual approach will not bring about the meaningful and equitable recovery our communities need and deserve. As you continue the work of building back better, I urge you to prioritize healing, starting with taking the following actions to address our national trauma crisis:

- **Develop a national strategy to address the collective impact of trauma.**  
The Administration should outline a comprehensive and cross-agency strategy that recognizes the impact of trauma and includes steps toward greater prevention and treatment strategies. The strategy should be informed by community partners and organizations with a proven track record of combatting the intersectional impacts of trauma and inform state and local efforts to mitigate and treat trauma.
- **Prioritize healing in your FY 2022 Presidential Budget Request.**

To meet the needs of our most vulnerable and our most marginalized, the budget must center their experiences and invest in their care. I urge you to heed the call of communities across the country who have been most greatly impacted by policy violence. This includes, but is not limited to, providing robust funding to:

- The Centers for Disease Control's Injury Center for continued research on adverse childhood experiences and grantmaking opportunities to local health departments, which are in the best position to understand community context and can develop culturally competent, evidence-based interventions for children, families, and communities.
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Project AWARE and the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, which increase communities' capacity to provide clinical services and mental health response training, conduct data collection and evaluation, and engage in mental health awareness campaigns.
- The Department of Health and Human Services to establish grants to Public Health Departments to identify geographic regions with high rates of adverse childhood experiences, conduct data analysis, and increase care coordination capacity and other interventions strategies focused on serving young people and other vulnerable populations. My bill, **The STRONG Support for Children Act**, would do just that, empowering community-based solutions to key contributors to trauma such as homelessness, food insecurity, and gun violence, while making culturally competent care available to communities.

These recommendations are by no means exhaustive. As the Presidential Budget Request takes form, it is critical that partners throughout all levels of government and community are heard and included.

- **Host a White House Summit on Combatting Community Trauma.**

As President, you have the power of convening agency leaders, state and local leaders, researchers and practitioners, advocates, organizers, and impacted communities to raise awareness and bring about solutions that can help us take an intersectional approach to combatting the trauma crisis in all of its forms. By convening the first ever White House Summit on Combatting Community Trauma, your Administration can make history and ensure that our national approach to this crisis is informed by the lived experiences of families and communities. I would welcome the opportunity to work with your Domestic Policy Council to develop and host this convening.

Our response to the trauma crisis must be as broad in scope and unrelenting as the violence that has triggered it. Prioritizing healing and trauma-informed policy is a commitment to restoring and healing the soul of our nation and our communities. When our policies and budgets are driven by compassion and center the experiences of those closest to the pain, we live up to the promise of a government for the people, by the people.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent matter. I stand ready to partner in any way to combat this crisis.

Sincerely,



Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control, “Violence Prevention: Fast Facts,” (2020) [https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Facedu%2Ffastfact.html](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fviolenceprevention%2Facedu%2Ffastfact.html)
- <sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control, “Overdose Deaths Accelerating During COVID-19,” (2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p1218-overdose-deaths-covid-19.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, “The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use,” (2020), Nirmita Panchal, Rabah Kamal, Kendal Orgera, Cynthia Cox, Rachel Garfield, <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>
- <sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control, “Mental Health-Related Emergency Department Visits Among Children Aged <18 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic—United States, January 1 – October 17, 2020” (2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm>