



The Bazelon Center Applauds President Biden’s Bipartisan Mental Health Strategy as a Comprehensive Blueprint for Community Based Mental Health

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Washington, D.C. March 2, 2022 – The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law enthusiastically commends President Joe Biden for including a bipartisan [mental health strategy](#) in his first State of the Union address. It is clear that the nation’s mental health care systems must be bolstered to address the systematic inequities in access to mental health resources, especially for Black and Brown people, that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. President Biden’s plan is a comprehensive blueprint for community-based mental health services to meet these urgent needs.

Today, when two out of five adults in this country live with depression and less than half have access to providers, and when one in three high school students report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, establishing a robust, community-based mental health care system has never been more urgent. In his State of the Union address, President Biden heeded the call: “Let’s get all Americans the mental health services they need. More people they can turn to for help, and full parity between physical and mental health care,” **President Biden says**, “Let’s take on mental health. Especially among our children, whose lives and education have been turned upside down.” We could not agree more.

We heartily applaud the following initiatives in the administration’s strategy, among others, and are excited for this urgent call on Congress to send bills to his desk to deliver critical mental health services to all constituents, especially youth and adults with disabilities, across the United States.

1. **Expanding Community-Based Mental Health Services** – The Bazelon Center has supported the unprecedented investment of home and community-based services in the American Rescue Plan Act. President Biden’s mental health strategy commits to the permanent extension of funding for Community Mental Health Centers, which will provide essential mental health services to the communities most impacted.
2. **Investing in Peer Support and Mobile Crisis Services** – Our communities have faced obstacles time and time again in supporting people with lived experience with mental

illness to obtain the training they need to help others in every aspect of the mental health service delivery, including in providing timely and effective response to those in crisis. We applaud the President's commitment to invest in an inclusive, integrated peer crisis response infrastructure that can meet the needs of our communities, especially our Black and Brown communities. We appreciate the [increased federal support for mobile crisis services in the American Rescue Plan Act](#), and call on states to commit to using these funds to develop these services, including peer workers, as a meaningful alternative to law enforcement response to people in crisis.

3. **Integrating mental health and substance use providers into community-based settings** – President Biden's mental health strategy recognizes the importance of community integration and providing access to mental health care without barriers by meeting people where they are. This investment will allow mental health support to be accessed in libraries, community centers, schools, and homeless shelters.
4. **Expanding access to mental health support in schools, colleges, and universities** – President Biden has announced that his next budget will propose an additional \$1 billion to help schools hire more counselors and other mental health professionals. Returning to our nation's schools after the pandemic, students desperately need effective mental health supports - not "hardened" schools where their behavior is criminalized. We applaud this investment to help schools obtain more Medicaid and other funding for mental health supports. Further, we endorse a [suite of bills](#) that have been introduced in Congress, including the Keeping All Students Safe Act, the Protecting Our Students in Schools Act, and the Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act, which includes federal grants to schools to implement evidence-based interventions that have been shown to support students, teachers, and administrators in fostering a safe and supportive school climate for all.
5. **Supporting Our Mental Health Workforce** – More than one-third of Americans live in designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas - communities that have fewer mental health service providers than they need. President Biden has announced a number of promising initiatives that would: incent our best and brightest to enter the mental health workforce, expand the supply, diversity, and cultural competency of our mental health workforce, as well as increase opportunities for them to practice in areas of highest need.
6. **Increasing mental health resources for justice-involved populations** – In too many communities, jails and other correctional facilities have become a provider of mental health services. The President's strategy will expand funding and technical assistance to local communities and corrections systems to provide behavioral health care, case management

services, family services, and other transitional programming to promote a smooth and successful transition to the community from jails and prisons - which should help [divert people with mental health issues from incarceration](#) in the first place.

“The Bazelon Center has for decades led the fight for a comprehensive community-based mental health service system in this country, a system that meets the needs of all people and helps them to thrive,” **said Ira Burnim, Legal Director of the Bazelon Center.** “We appreciate the President’s thoughtful agenda, and we look forward to working with his administration and with Congress to make his vision a reality.”

The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law protects and advances the civil rights of people with mental and developmental disabilities – especially Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), and other historically marginalized populations. We envision a society where our constituents with mental disabilities live with autonomy, dignity, and opportunity in welcoming communities, supported by law, policy, and practices that help them reach their full potential. For more information, visit: bazelon.org. This year, the Bazelon Center will be celebrating 50 years of advocacy. To learn more about our advocacy throughout the years, visit bazelon50.org.