

## FROM KATHERINE B. MCGUIRE, APA CHIEF ADVOCACY OFFICER

For the Week of May 20, 2019

APA's advocacy staff is working to **enforce mental health parity, protect children, increase funding for psychological research** and much more.

### *This week's action includes:*

**Voicing Concern About a Housing Proposal That Could Separate Families:** In a [letter](#) to Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Ben Carson, APA expressed deep concern that a proposed [rule](#) would prohibit families from living together in subsidized housing unless all members are eligible for housing aid. APA explained that the rule could lead to separating families, which could have devastating psychological consequences, especially for children. APA shared the letter with key congressional staff and issued a [press release](#) on the issue. Next, APA is scheduling meetings with congressional offices for in-person discussions.

**Endorsing Three Bills to Enforce Mental Health Parity:** Along with its coalition partners, APA voiced support for legislation that would strengthen mental health parity:

- The Mental Health Parity Compliance Act, which would require mental health and substance use disorder benefit coverage to be at least equal with physical health. Read [APA's letter](#).
- The Behavioral Health Coverage Transparency Act, which would strengthen oversight of insurers and create an office that would inform consumers about their rights. Read about [APA's action](#).
- The Parity Enforcement Act, which would fine health insurers for not providing parity or for offering plans that are noncompliant with federal parity laws. Read about [APA's action](#).

**Calling for a White House Science Advisory Council:** In a [letter](#) to the federal Office of Science and Technology Policy, APA encouraged the reinstatement of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. Made up of the nation's leading scientists, the council has been [an important asset](#) to many previous administrations. APA's letter also called for the council to include psychological, social and behavioral scientists on the next council.

**Raising Awareness About the Risks to Immigrants:** APA advocacy staff discussed the association's latest work to support immigrants with members of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. APA's leadership in this area includes developing strong connections with members of Congress and their staff to ensure they understand the

psychological harms immigrants can face. To date, APA staff has distributed nearly 80 copies of the Immigration Psychology Working Group report "[Vulnerable But Not Broken](#)" to members of Congress and staff.

**Securing Funds for Psychology's Defense Priorities:** APA advocacy helped to secure two key provisions in a House bill to fund the Department of Defense. The first recommends reinstating the Peer-Reviewed Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs, which had been zeroed out in President Trump's budget proposal. These programs support research on Alzheimer's disease, autism, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder and more.

In a second victory for APA, the House agreed with APA's position that a proposal to eliminate 17,000 uniformed medical personnel positions, including psychologists, would be harmful to military personnel. As a result, the House bill included language demanding that DOD reconsider the job eliminations. APA is now working with the Senate on these two priorities.

**Highlighting Psychologists' Roles in Serving Military Personnel:** APA staff met with senior Department of Veterans Affairs leadership about the association's work to enhance the mental health and well-being of veterans, their families, caregivers and communities—and to support the psychologists who serve them. APA lobbies Congress and the VA to improve laws and policies on issues such as veteran suicide prevention, provision of evidence-based psychotherapies, protection of the VA's integrated care system, support for intramural VA research, and the creation of interdisciplinary pain management teams.

**Celebrating Wins in House Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations:** The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related agencies approved Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 appropriations on Wednesday, showing strong support for APA priorities. The bill includes \$8.6 billion for the National Science Foundation (NSF)—an increase of 7 percent over this year. Also, the committee specifically recognized the importance of NSF-supported social, behavioral and economic (SBE) research, and recommended no less than the FY 2019 level funding for NSF's SBE Directorate.

The Office on Violence Against Women would receive increased funding levels in FY 2020 for several priority programs for APA, including \$222 million for the STOP Grants to combat violence against women, \$26 million for Grants to Combat Violent Crimes on College Campuses, \$9 million for Protections and Services for Disabled Victims, \$9 million for the Elder Abuse Grant Program and \$5 million for Grants to Tribal Governments.

The committee also approved an \$8.5 billion increase for the Census Bureau. In a win for APA, the bill directs the Census Bureau to expand data collection on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. The bill also includes language barring the Commerce Department from adding a question to the 2020 Census about citizenship status, an issue being considered by the Supreme Court.

**Advocating for Inclusive Paid Family and Medical Leave:** APA joined a [Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities statement](#) expressing support for creating a flexible, comprehensive and inclusive paid leave policy. The statement was submitted to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means. The statement underscores the importance of considering the needs of persons with disabilities and their families in crafting paid leave policies and urged Congress to reject proposals that would pay for family and medical leave by drawing from workers' future Social Security benefits.

**Celebrating Passage of Equality Act:** APA staff hand-delivered to all 435 House offices copies of the APA book, "[Jacob's Room to Choose](#)." The children's story explains the many forms of gender expression and the importance of treating each other with respect. Staff explained that the book delivery was APA's way of celebrating the passage of the Equality Act, which seeks to amend civil rights law to provide clear, consistent civil rights protections for sexual and gender minorities. APA followed up with emails to every House member explaining the [scientific underpinnings](#) of its support for the act.

**Responding to State Action on Abortion:** In the wake of multiple state actions on abortion, federal lawmakers introduced a resolution affirming women's reproductive rights in both the Senate and the House. Although federal legislation is unlikely to have an impact, APA is compiling resources and talking points based on the latest research to share with State, Provincial and Territorial Psychological Associations on abortion rights and mental health as well as monitoring related cases as they make their way through the courts.