



The Kid Angle

Kid-focused news from First Focus on Children

Peer-to-peer support gaining ground in Congress December 21, 2023

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The Senate has stuck around to wrap up its year-end business. Among the confirmations of military brass and other activities, they might also consider moving on another measure: [**A bill to address the mental health needs of children.**](#)

[**A dozen advocacy groups have joined forces to buoy the Supporting All Students Act,**](#) a bill introduced by Sens. Bob Casey (D-PA) and Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) that would establish a youth peer-to-peer support line and a grant program for school-based mental health coordinators.

These excellent ideas have bubbled up from the states. Peer-to-peer support lines have proven effective in several settings, including Oregon, where Youthline provides a free, confidential, teen-to-teen crisis support hotline. In [**Alabama and Maryland, lawmakers are exploring the use of school-based mental health coordinators,**](#) professionals intended to help identify children who need mental health services and make sure they are connected to the care they need either in school or the larger community. First Focus Campaign for Children, which has [**long advocated for both of these interventions,**](#) helped Sen. Casey's staff craft the new legislation.

Just a reminder that the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), always under threat of Congressional cancellation, also originated in the states, specifically in Pennsylvania after the 1980s demise of the Pittsburgh steel industry. ([**Fun Fact: Sen. Casey's father, Gov. Robert P. Casey, Sr., signed into law the program that would morph into CHIP.**](#))

Children in the United States are facing [**unprecedented mental health challenges.**](#) In October 2021, First Focus on Children joined other leading children's health organizations to [**declare a national state of emergency regarding child mental health**](#) in the [**Sound the Alarm campaign,**](#) and in December 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General issued [**an advisory titled**](#) "Protecting Youth Mental Health" which precipitated a wave of hearings and legislation by Congress.



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