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February 8, 2022

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Chairman
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Ranking Member
Committee on Finance
United States Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Wyden and Ranking Member Crapo:

Thank you for holding today's hearing entitled *Protecting Youth Mental Health: An Advisory and Call to Action*.

On behalf of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), the nation's largest membership organization for hospice and palliative care professionals, we share your commitment to addressing the mental health crisis facing the America's young people.

One often overlooked aspect of mental health is addressing grief. NHPCO and our hospice and palliative care members nationwide have more than 40 years of experience in helping individuals, families, and communities process grief. As part of the Medicare hospice benefit, providers offer families of hospice patients 13 months of bereavement care after the death of a loved one. In times of need, hospice providers are often turned to as experts in bereavement care and extend this care to the wider community, free of charge.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how people die, and how we grieve. Families have had limited ability to visit those that are most vulnerable, including those experiencing serious illness and the end of life. Time spent together has been cut short. Many patients have lost the opportunity to choose the hospice benefit due to the rapid progression of the illness, and some families have been unable to access mental health care in the wake of a loss.

COVID-19 has brought new attention to critical mental health issues, including complicated and prolonged grief and the impact of bereavement on children. More than 175,000 American children have lost a parent or grandparent caregiver to COVID-19, and concentrated loss in underserved communities has unequally distributed the psychological cost of these losses. Some of the negative consequences of childhood grief are increased use of substance abuse, higher risk of depression and criminal behavior, lower employment rates and academic underachievement. This has underscored the need for a national conversation on grief, the expansion of grief literacy, and the extension of bereavement care in underserved vulnerable communities and across the country.

We are grateful for your leadership as the nation battles a mental health crisis. Congress must play an active role in addressing this crisis; including legislation to combat grief with funding for targeted care and research. As Congress continues to address this long-term effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, we look forward to continuing to collaborate toward this common goal. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to our Chief Advocacy Officer, Hannah Yang Moore (hmoore@nhpco.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edo Banach".

Edo Banach, J.D.

President and CEO