



## APA ADVOCACY

# Washington Update

*APA Advocacy Washington Update is a weekly newsletter that highlights how APA is working to advance the discipline and practice of psychology on Capitol Hill and beyond.*

## Calling for Immediate Halt to Sharing Confidential Psychotherapy Notes



In a [letter](#) to Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar and Acting Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Chad F. Wolf, APA requested that the Office of Refugee Resettlement stop sharing confidential mental health information obtained from child immigrants in shelter care with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents who are making asylum determinations. **This practice violates broadly accepted mental health ethical privacy and disclosure standards** and impedes the delivery of effective treatment for children who have experienced trauma. The letter also points out that the sharing of such confidential information will cause distrust and prevent children from accessing mental health care in the future.

*For more information, contact Kim Mills at [kmills@apa.org](mailto:kmills@apa.org).*

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### Raising Concerns About Possible Religious Discrimination in Care

On Jan. 17, eight federal agencies proposed revisions to regulations for faith-based organizations that participate in federal social services programs. In [comments](#) submitted to each agency on Feb. 18, APA stated that the proposed changes open the door to religious discrimination against vulnerable populations by ending requirements that faith-based organizations refer individuals who ask for a secular alternative. Rather than ensuring that the federal government treats faith-based organizations the same as secular organizations, **the proposed regulations elevate the interests of federally funded social service providers above the needs and the rights of people who seek social services.** The agencies proposing the new regulations are the Agency for International

Development, and the Departments of Agriculture, Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Justice, Labor and Veterans Affairs.

For more information, contact Leo Rennie, MPA, at [lrennie@apa.org](mailto:lrennie@apa.org).

### **Seeking to Improve Mental Health Care and Discipline in Schools**

APA endorsed the Ending PUSHOUT Act (H.R. 5325), introduced by Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.), which seeks to end exclusionary and discriminatory school discipline practices and the “school-to-prison pipeline.” The legislation aligns with [APA's recommendations](#) that policymakers should consider proactive, evidence-informed and data-driven initiatives that foster equity in school discipline and inclusive school environments for all students. The legislation would provide funding to train school personnel on evidence-based, nonpunitive methods to address student discipline; expand access to mental health programs for students; and hire more school counselors and other mental and behavioral health professionals. The bill also calls for the federal government to collect and disseminate more data on the impact of exclusionary practices on students with disabilities. Finally, the bill calls for psychologists to be included as part of an interagency task force to further study the issue.

For more information, contact Kenneth Polishchuk at [kpolishchuk@apa.org](mailto:kpolishchuk@apa.org) or Leo Rennie, MPA, at [lrennie@apa.org](mailto:lrennie@apa.org).

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