



Amid Ongoing Pandemic Anxiety, King Introduces Bill to Support Children’s Mental Health

Maine Youth Development Community Welcomes Senator’s Efforts and Vision

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Angus King (I-Maine) today announced the introduction of the *Improving Data Collection for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Act*, a bill that would authorize \$10 million annually over five years to support Centers for Disease Control (CDC) research and data collection efforts on the impact of childhood trauma on long-term health. This field of study is increasingly important, as existing research shows that certain negative events, circumstances, or maltreatment during childhood – known as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) – are associated with negative health outcomes both in childhood and later in life. An increased understanding of the connection between ACEs and long-term health is now even more critical, as studies from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) show that social isolation, school closures, and other stressors unleashed by the coronavirus pandemic may be amplifying ACEs.

“Our children have experienced an unprecedented number of changes this past year, as they’ve had to break their usual routines, stay distant from friends and loved ones, and for far too many, cope with the loss of a loved one due to the coronavirus pandemic,” **said Senator King**. “The pandemic has exacerbated anxiety, fueled depression, and amplified feelings of stress and uncertainty for many, while at the same time cutting down access for our children to the services and support networks they have grown to rely upon. In order to best protect the health of our young people, we have to understand the challenges they’re facing and the toll it could take in the future – which is why the CDC should have the funding it needs to research the impacts of adverse childhood experiences and find ways to mitigate their long-term effects.

“We applaud Senator King’s introduction of the Improving Data Collection for Adverse Childhood Experiences Act, which will expand our knowledge of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in important ways,” **said John Auerbach, President and CEO of Trust for America’s Health**. “This bill would allow the CDC to build on previous

research to examine the impacts of adverse experiences, identify protective factors, and do so through a health equity lens by ensuring representation of diverse communities. A child's experiences can have long lasting impacts on their life. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) found](#) ACEs, like abuse and neglect, are associated with five of the top ten leading causes of death."

"As part of the MaineHealth family, Maine Behavioral Healthcare is grateful for Senator King's commitment to supporting policies that increase attention on the impact of ACEs on physical and behavioral health," **said Kelly Barton, President of Maine Behavioral Healthcare.** "Research demonstrates a direct correlation between Adverse Childhood Experiences and chronic diseases, such as cancer and heart disease, as well as increased risk for depression, anxiety, substance use disorder and suicidal ideation. This legislation will improve our knowledge of ACEs, allowing providers to work better together to improve the health of our communities."

"The Maine Resilience Building Network supports the bill to provide additional research and programmatic efforts that build upon past research on the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and the translation from research to practice in community programs," **said Kini Tinkham, Executive Director of Maine Resilience Building Network.** "The research shows protective factors such as a healthy relationship with a caring adult outside of the home supports resilience building. Building resilience and cultivating mattering in youth may be key to preventing the root causes of some of our critical public health issues such as mental health, suicide and opioid misuse. Expanding data to include health equity and adverse community environments measures will inform prevention practices key to the long-term health and wellbeing of our children."

[According to the CDC](#), an estimated 62 percent of adults surveyed across 23 states reported that they had experienced one ACE during childhood and nearly one-quarter reported that they had experienced three or more ACEs. The CDC has recognized ACEs as a major public health concern and made it a priority area for focus in the National Center for Injury Prevention. However, there remain significant gaps in research to better define and understand ACEs. Senator King's bill would make funding available to build on previous research and better understand how ACEs effect people throughout their lives.

More specifically, the bill's funding would support the elements not included in previous CDC research, including:

- The inclusion of a diverse nationally representative sample of participants;
- The strength of the relationship between specific ACEs and negative health outcomes;
- The intensity and frequency of ACEs;

- The relative strength of particular risk and protective factors; and
- The effect of social, economic, and community conditions on health and well-being.

Senator King is a supportive of providing additional resources to bolster mental health services given the anxiety and uncertainty caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Last week, he [urged](#) the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to prioritize efforts to study and understand the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of children and young adults. In September, Senator King introduced the [Social-Emotional Learning for Families \(SELF\) Act](#) to provide additional resources to support the mental health and safety of children and improve educational outcomes for students. In May, Senator King [participated in a video teleconference](#) with Maine Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services to connect with their staff that work with Maine's behavioral health organizations and help those coping with substance use disorders and mental health challenges. Near the beginning of the pandemic, Senator King also urged [increased investments in mental and behavioral health](#) in future COVID-19 relief legislation. Reports have shown Americans are experiencing negative effects on their mental health due to the coronavirus pandemic – which could pose short- and long-term dangers to their well-being.