

June 5, 2023

The Honorable Henry D. McMaster
Governor of South Carolina
South Carolina Statehouse, First Floor
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Governor McMaster,

In January 2022, at your direction, the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (SCDHHS) performed a comprehensive review and analysis of the South Carolina Department of Mental Health's (DMH) school mental health services program. On May 3, 2022, SCDHHS announced the [results of this comprehensive review](#) and [made seven recommendations](#) to improve access to mental health services in South Carolina's public schools. In support of these recommendations, SCDHHS enacted policy changes beginning July 1, 2022, designed to remove barriers that prevented children from accessing the mental health services they need.

Today, I am pleased to report significant progress in improving the number of mental health counselors providing services in South Carolina's schools. According to January 2023 survey data, 995 mental health counselors were available to provide services in the school setting compared to approximately 600 in January 2022, an increase of 65.8%. This improvement is a testament to the collaborative approach we have developed with the school districts, DMH and the private sector and the increased reimbursement rates we have enacted for these services with your support and the support of the South Carolina General Assembly. With the increase in counselors, South Carolina's mental health counselor to student ratio has improved from 1:1,300 in Spring 2022 to 1:829 students in January 2023.

I have enclosed a summary of the survey results and the actions we have taken over the last year to provide South Carolina school districts with greater choice in how they are able to meet the mental health needs of their students. While we are proud of the progress we are reporting today, our goal remains to further improve the mental health counselor to student ratio to 1:650 students later this year with a long-term goal of achieving a ratio of 1:325. We look forward to continuing our work to improve access to these vital services in concert with our other initiatives designed to improve coordination and continuity of care throughout the state's health care delivery system.

Thank you for your continued attention to this mental health crisis and dedication to ensuring our children have access to mental health services and safe and productive learning environments.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Kerr