August 17, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

We, the Utah Student Association, write this letter to express our concern for the mental health of our fellow students. While improvements have been made, many of our students are untreated due to lacking resources. These issues affect the well-being, success, and retention of students across the state—directly impacting the state's ability to reach the goal of 66% by 2020.

As you may know, the following realities exist in Utah:
- Utah has one of the highest rates of depression and suicide in the nation. Those between the ages of 18-24 are the most affected age-group of this demographic (Utah Department of Health, 2015).
- Mental illness corresponds with higher dropout rates, lower GPA, and an increase in mortality rates (NAMI 2012).
- On average, a college student in Utah has to wait four to eight weeks to get an appointment at a counseling center. At some schools, the wait time is as long as 11 weeks (Utah Student Association, 2015).

Due to these realities, we encourage each USHE institution to find creative solutions for our students that are both practical and long-lasting. We encourage each university to consider the following three-pronged approach to aid in addressing this growing problem:

1. *Increase access to therapists:* It is critical that we increase the number of therapists and resources for students in crisis on each of our campuses. Hiring additional therapists and using crises lines, text-support lines, phone applications like SafeUT, and ensuring that students are trained in Question, Persuade, Refer techniques is crucial in providing direct access to students in crisis (Buchanan, 2012; Gould et al., 2013; Tompkins & Witt, 2009).
2. *Create a support network:* Social support helps prevent mental health problems from worsening, and increases students' academic achievement (Whitlock et al., 2010). Drawing from the examples of other university successes like Michigan State's Wolverine Support Network and collaborating with community resources like Utah NAMI support groups, we can find ways to provide lasting social support for our students.
3. *Emphasize preventative care:* We must continue to decrease the stigma surrounding mental health issues through marketing campaigns. In addition, we need to continue to emphasize preventative care through access to mental health programs on campus.

Thank you in advance for your careful consideration of this problem and for working with us to implement lasting change.

Sincerely,

Ashley Waddoups, Utah State University

Ty B. Aller, Utah State University

Avery Harding, Brigham Young University

Sarah Ramaker, Dixie State University

Birch Eve, Utah Valley University

Anand Benjamin Polk, Westminster College

Arturo Salazar, Salt Lake Community College
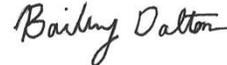
Tyler Cornia, Southern Utah University

Jack Bender, University of Utah

Phill Raich, Utah State University Eastern

Gregory Woodfield, Weber State University

Bailey Dalton, Snow College