



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

House Committee on Education and Labor

Full Committee Markup

H.R. 604, the *Rebuild America's Schools Act*

H.R. 7701, the *Wage Theft Prevention and Wage Recovery Act*

H.R. 5407, the *Enhancing Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Through Campus Planning Act*

H.R. 6493, the *Campus Prevention and Recovery Services for Students Act of 2022*

H.R. 7780, the *Mental Health Matters Act*

Wednesday, May 18, 2022 | 10:15 a.m.

Today, the Committee is marking up five bills to support America's students, workers, and families.

The first bill, the Rebuild America's School's Act, led by me and the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Norcross, provides the necessary investments to ensure that students and educators have access to safe and healthy places to work and learn.

A growing body of research shows that high-quality facilities help improve academic achievement, reduce student and staff absences, and reduce suspensions. Yet, far too many children attend schools that are unsafe. For example, just before the pandemic, the Government Accountability Office found that four in 10 school districts need to update or replace their HVAC system in at least half of their schools. Decrepit HVAC systems can risk the safety of students and staff by failing to protect them from extreme temperatures, increasing the risk of mold exposure and allow air quality so poor to help protect against the spread of COVID-19.

While the American Rescue Plan delivered investments to help schools reopen safely, keep them open safely, and make up for lost learning time, research shows that K-12 schools still need additional and sustained investments to deliver healthy, safe, and efficient school facilities.

This is a key priority in our fight against persistent disparities in education. Yesterday marked the 68th anniversary of the Supreme Court's historic *Brown v. Board of Education* case, which struck down lawful school segregation. Yet, we know that public schools are now more segregated by race and class than any time since the 1960s. This has a direct impact on the resources that underserved schools have to invest in their school facilities. As our nation's students continue to become more diverse, we have a responsibility to invest in helping all public schools meet their infrastructure needs.

This legislation would deliver on that goal.

The second bill, the Wage Theft Prevention and Wage Recovery Act, protects workers' hard-earned wages and holds unscrupulous employers accountable.

According to a 2017 study conducted by the Economic Policy Institute, employers steal 25 percent of minimum wage workers' annual earnings. That translates to roughly \$3,300 a year that cannot be used for essential expenses like rent, groceries, or child care.

Although wage theft practices are already illegal under the Fair Labor Standards Act, or the F-L-S-A, the law's trivial penalties and damages provisions have not prevented wage theft. Furthermore, employers use a variety of legal loopholes to evade accountability.

According to testimony at last week's hearing, an employer who is actually caught stealing wages and sanctioned will still be better off and save money compared to those who pay wages that are actually owed.

Simply put, current law puts honest employers at a competitive disadvantage to dishonest employers.

The Wage Theft Prevention and Wage Recovery Act provides a responsible solution by increasing civil monetary penalties, enforcing stronger record keeping, and helping employees seek justice.

The third bill, which is a bipartisan bill, is the Enhancing Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Through Campus Planning Act. This incentivizes institutions of higher education to develop and implement mental health programs.

Since the start of the pandemic, campus counseling centers have responded to an increased demand for student mental health services with limited funding, staff, and resources.

This bill would encourage institutions to develop a broader and more comprehensive range of mental health services in coordination with existing federal, state, and community stakeholders.

The fourth bill is the Campus Prevention and Recovery Services for Students Act of 2022.

This bill brings together the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services to support institutions in developing evidence-based prevention and recovery programs that are aimed at preventing alcohol and substance misuse and support students with substance use disorders.

Finally, the Mental Health Matters Act, which is led by the Chair of the Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions Subcommittee, the gentleman from California, Mr. DeSaulnier, includes a comprehensive set of proposals championed by several Members on our Committee. This legislation will:

- Help Head Start agencies implement evidence-based interventions to improve the health of children and staff;
- Improve trauma-informed services in schools;
- Ensure mental health and substance use disorder services are accessible in employer-sponsored health insurance; and
- Recruit and retain school-based mental health counselors.

I want to thank the gentlelady from Oregon, Ms. Bonamici, the gentleman from Connecticut, Mr. Courtney, the gentlelady from Connecticut, Ms. Hayes, and the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Norcross, for their leadership on this legislation.

Taken together, these bills will advance Americans' financial, mental, and physical health—steps that are sorely needed to ensure every American has the opportunity to succeed. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting these bills.