Expressing the mental health impacts of recurrent climate-related disasters on youth.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
March 9, 2022
Mr. Thompson of California (for himself and Ms. Castor of Florida) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce

RESOLUTION
Expressing the mental health impacts of recurrent climate-related disasters on youth.

Whereas there is a significant, negative impact that rapid and ongoing climate change has on America’s youth;

Whereas youth are especially vulnerable to the physical and mental health impacts of climate-related disasters and the cumulative toll youth will endure from additional exposure to increasing climate-related disasters;

Whereas youth represent a particularly vulnerable group because greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere will impact today’s and tomorrow’s youth throughout their biological, psychological, academic, and social development;

Whereas an American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica report stated that, as of 2016, as climate-re-
lated disasters continue to increase, more youth will be
directly affected by increasing rates of stress and trauma
through interruption in schooling, disruptions in routine,
separation from caregivers due to evacuations or displace-
ment, and parental stress after a disaster;

Whereas recent studies cited in the American Psychological
Association and ecoAmerica report have documented that
high levels of stress during childhood, such as those asso-
ciated with the experience of a climate-related disaster or
displacement, can affect the development of neural path-
ways in ways that impair memory, executive function,
and decision making in later life;

Whereas a 2016 Social Science & Medicine study found that
experiencing an extreme weather event before age 5 re-
sulted in higher levels of anxiety and depression among
adults;

Whereas studies document that many young people are grap-
pling with the impact of climate change;

Whereas recent studies confirm those from low-income com-
munities, indigenous communities, and communities of
color are often the most vulnerable to the worst impacts
of climate change, such as flooding, drought, fire, and ex-
treme heat;

Whereas a study by the American Public Health Association
and ecoAmerica, Making the Connection: Climate
Changes Mental Health, shows that up to 45 percent of
youth have developed depression after a climate-related
disaster, affecting both their caregivers and the youth
themselves;
Whereas a National Library of Medicine study found an association between increases in pediatric psychiatrist visits and polluted air from wildfires;

Whereas there are direct links between fine particulate matter (PM 2.5) exposure and neuropsychological effects, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, decreased memory, depleted academic performance, and autism;

Whereas, according to a 2017 report by the Lancet Planetary Health Journal, The Impact of Climate Change on Youth Depression and Mental Health, an increase in emergency department visits was incited by higher levels of humidity and rising temperatures;

Whereas, in 2021, 64 percent of Americans lived in places that experienced a multiday heat wave, considered the most dangerous form of climate-related disaster and the frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters is increasing exponentially;

Whereas a 2019 report suggested that as the frequency of heat waves increases due to the climate crisis, school-based outdoor recreational opportunities for youth that benefit mental and physical well-being will be curtailed by extreme heat;

Whereas, in 2020, a poll from the Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation found that 57 percent of teenagers stated they were frightened by climate change, while 52 percent were angered by it and a mere 29 percent of youth were optimistic for the future in regards to climate change;

Whereas, according to a 2021 study surveying over 10,000 youth, 45 percent of respondents reported that thoughts
of climate change have affected their daily lives and abilities negatively;

Whereas, in 2021, The National Association of School Psychologists, representing more than 25,000 members, declared the need to increase awareness of the harmful effects of climate change on youth, increase resources, and advocate for climate justice;

Whereas the American Psychological Association has issued a report stating that children are among those facing the greatest impacts of climate change; and

Whereas the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child has concluded that children and youth are better off during adversity if they also have the help of noncaregiver role models, such as teachers or coaches: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) shall take effective action on climate change, guided by the science provided in the 2021 United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, to protect the mental health of current and future youth; and

(2) supports the expansion of funding of climate education, resilience, and adaptation projects that benefit the mental health of youth, including—

(A) incorporating mental health into existing disaster preparation efforts;
(B) engaging in education and outreach to reduce the stigma associated with seeking treatment;

(C) reducing cost and increasing access for treatment (e.g., through federally qualified health centers and mobile and virtual health care);

(D) increasing insurance and Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement for mental health care treatment;

(E) funding community-wide vulnerability assessments;

(F) addressing inequity by studying the impacts of income disparity at local levels that have been linked to higher community-wide vulnerability to climate risk;

(G) expanding local, place-based, mutual aid networks that supply mental health support during and post climate-related disaster events; and

(H) providing direct funding to school districts that need immediate resources to help children and families cope with the mental
health effects of continued climate-related disasters.