



# Midwestern Legislative Conference

THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

## 73rd Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Legislative Conference of The Council of State Governments

July 15 – 18, 2018

### Resolution in Support of State and Federal Efforts to Address Rural Mental Health Needs

- WHEREAS,** the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that people working in agriculture take their lives at a rate higher than other occupations, with rates nearly five times higher than the general population, with even veterinarians having a 1.6 times greater suicide mortality rate than the general population; and
- WHEREAS,** causes of the high suicide rate among agriculture workers are many, including “social isolation, potential for financial losses, barriers to and unwillingness to seek mental health services (which might be limited in rural areas), and access to lethal means,” according to the CDC; and
- WHEREAS,** difficult economic conditions are placing additional strain on our nation’s farmers and ranchers and their families, with projections showing that net farm income will fall once again in 2018; according to the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2018 median farm income is projected to be a negative \$1,316; and
- WHEREAS,** today’s suicide rates for male farmers are 50 percent higher than they were during the 1980s; and
- WHEREAS,** telephone hotlines and state crisis centers have been critical to reducing incidences of farmer suicide, and legislation supporting funding for rural mental health efforts have been included in previous federal farm bills but left unfunded; and
- WHEREAS,** a few Midwestern states and provinces offer rural-specific resources, including Minnesota’s Rural Mental Health Counselor, Wisconsin’s Farm Center Hotline, Saskatchewan’s Farm Stress Line, Nebraska’s Rural Response Hotline and Iowa Concern; and
- WHEREAS,** bipartisan legislation (S 2712, the FARMERS FIRST Act) has been proposed by Midwestern senators has been included in the Senate version of the 2018 farm bill; it would strengthen networks and programs that farmers can turn to for mental health needs by channeling competitive federal grants to nonprofits, state extension offices or state departments of agriculture to establish helplines, provide suicide prevention training, create support groups, and reestablish the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network and it; now therefore be it

*Adopted this 18<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2018 at the 73<sup>rd</sup> MLC Annual Meeting in Winnipeg, Manitoba*

- RESOLVED,** that the Midwestern Legislative Conference (MLC) urges state and provincial legislators to review the rural mental health programs and funding available in their states; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** that the MLC urges the congressional delegations from its member states to strongly support the FARMERS FIRST Act in order to address the rural mental health crisis with funding to protect our farmers, their families and our communities, and be it further
- RESOLVED,** that MLC urges the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to expeditiously establish the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network, which will institute outreach, training, counseling and focused communication between state departments of agriculture and cooperative extensions in the region and farmers and ranchers at risk; and be it further
- RESOLVED,** that this resolution be submitted to appropriate state and federal officials.

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