

May 18, 2020

The Nebraska Psychological Association is dismayed by the commencement speech that US Senator Ben Sasse delivered to graduating seniors at Fremont High School on May 16. Rather than acknowledge the tremendous challenges presented by this pandemic crisis, and provide these graduates with the inspiration, wisdom, and support they need, Senator Sasse instead chose to belittle them, insult their families, and make demeaning remarks about the psychology profession.

As highly trained mental health professionals and as community members, we are disturbed that a US senator would send such a message to these young people, who have already experienced high levels of community trauma and now face an uncertain future. We would hope that Senator Sasse, with whom NPA leadership has met many times to advocate for Nebraskans' mental health needs, would demonstrate better judgment.

We would also like the opportunity to correct Senator Sasse's impression of the utility of psychology. In Nebraska, psychologists have increased the number of mental health professionals by 18 percent. This is significant in a state with a very high number of [Mental Health Care Health Professional Shortage Areas](#). The COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified this very serious need for additional providers. We strongly encourage graduates to consider the study of psychology or other mental/behavioral health professions, which offer enriching and valued careers.

During this time of unprecedented collective trauma, loss, and rapid change, psychologists in Nebraska are continuing to do what we do everywhere: provide assessment and treatment across the lifespan; consult and collaborate with other clinicians and agencies; do research, supervision and training for multidisciplinary clinicians; advocate for legislation and public policy that increase access to care; and remain nimble in adapting to new challenges presented by crises like this one.

As we have many times in the past, we expect to respectfully and collaboratively meet with Senator Sasse for education, consultation, and information about the behavioral health care needs of his constituents.



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