



STATE OF DELAWARE
STATE COUNCIL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
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The Honorable John Carney
Governor

John McNeal
SCPD Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 10, 2021

TO: All Members of the Delaware State Senate
and House of Representatives

FROM: Terri Hancharick – Chairperson TH
State Council for Persons with Disabilities

RE: H.B. 100 (Mental Health Units for Elementary Schools)

The State Council for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD) has reviewed H.B. 100, which proposes the establishment of a mental health services unit in every Delaware public elementary school (including charter schools). SCPD endorses the proposed legislation and has the following observations.

The bill would require the State to fund “one school counselor, or school social worker or licensed clinical social worker licensed as a school social worker” per 250 full-time enrolled students, and one school psychologist for every 700 full-time enrolled students. These ratios align with what is recommended by the American School Counselor Association and the National Association of School Psychologists, respectively (see “School Counselors Matter,” American School Counselor Association, Feb. 2019, available at: <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/b079d17d-6265-4166-a120-3b1f56077649/School-Counselors-Matter.pdf>; “The Shortage of School Psychologists,” National Association of School Psychologists, available at

<https://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/policy-priorities/critical-policy-issues/shortage-of-school-psychologists>

The introduction of this bill is very timely as the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has raised serious concerns about the long-term effects of increased isolation and remote learning on child mental health (see, e.g. Jeffrey Kluger, “The Coronavirus Seems to Spare Most Kids From Illness, but Its Effect on Their Mental Health Is Deepening,” Time (July 23, 2020), available at <https://time.com/5870478/children-mental-health-coronavirus/>). A similar bill had been introduced on March 19, 2019 but did not make it out of committee. At that time, the SCPD expressed concerns about the ongoing workforce shortages in the mental health field, and the recent introduction of more stringent requirements for Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) licensure, which could cause potential difficulties for schools in filling the required positions. While those concerns remain relevant in 2021, the potential long-term impact of the current crisis on child mental health simply cannot be ignored, and the Council encourages any opportunity for additional funding of mental health resources for school-aged youth.

It is also important to note that in recent years the Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health (DBPHS) has expanded its partnerships with Delaware school districts, which has included placed Family Crisis Therapists (FCTs) in many Delaware elementary schools. According to DPBHS’s website, there are currently FCTs placed at 53 elementary schools throughout Delaware (further information, including a list of participating schools, is available at https://kids.delaware.gov/mss/mss_opei_early_intervention.shtml). Additionally, Delaware received a large grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in 2018 to launch Project DelAWARE, a partnership to pilot expanded in-school mental health screening and services in three Delaware school districts (further information is available at <https://www.doe.k12.de.us/domain/588>). Project DelAWARE is funded through September 30, 2023. If the bill should pass, it would be crucial for the Department of Education to coordinate effectively with the DPBHS to ensure that they are not duplicating efforts and that their resources can reach as many students as possible.

Another issue to consider in light of the ongoing pandemic is that it would be important to ensure that the allocated mental health resources are still available to students and their families during periods of mandated remote learning. SCPD recommends that more specific language about this is included in the bill.

SCPD endorses the proposed legislation but has the following recommendations:

- That there be robust coordination between the DSCYF and the school psychologists and social workers to eliminate duplication of efforts and improve quality of service.
- That there be robust and intentional collaboration between service providers operating in the schools and providing mental health services.
- That resources should be available to families using remote learning.

Thank you for your consideration and please contact SCPD if you have any questions or comments regarding our position and observations on the proposed legislation.

cc: Ms. Laura Waterland, Esq.
Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens
Developmental Disabilities Council

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