

# Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6643

AN ACT CONCERNING MEDICAID REIMBURSEMENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE RISK ASSESSMENTS CONDUCTED AT SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTERS AND INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR THE PROVISION OF

**Title:** MENTAL HEALTH WELLNESS EXAMINATIONS.

**Vote Date:** 3/2/2023

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 2/16/2023

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Committee on Children.

## **COSPONSORS OF BILL:**

Sen. Saud Anwar, 3<sup>rd</sup> Dist.

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill authorizes Medicaid reimbursement for suicide risk assessments and other similar mental health evaluations to be conducted by school-based health centers and public schools. This bill also eliminates the requirement of these examinations to be done by primary care providers for purposes of insurance coverages.

This bill seeks to alleviate a student mental health crisis that is occurring in our schools. Students are dealing with mental health issues at greater rates, and often due to cost they have no services to assist them. This bill allows for Medicaid reimbursement to be used by schools and school-based health centers to alleviate that stress that so many students deal with when trying to access these services. This bill also eliminates the need for a primary care provider to administer these examinations which gives greater flexibility to schools and also creates breathing room for the current worker shortage we are seeing across the state. This bill increases access to vital mental health and wellness services for students.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

Connecticut Department of Social Services, Commissioner, Andrea Barton Reeves, comments on the bill adding that the Department currently reimburses for behavior health evaluations performed by school districts, and that suicide risk assessments may be made as part of a comprehensive evaluation that would be fully reimbursable under Medicaid when administered by a school-based health center.

State of Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate, Acting Child Advocate, Sarah Healy Eagan, supports this bill and all efforts to fund mental health assessments and treatment for children.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

NAMI Connecticut, Public Policy and Affiliates Relations Manager, Thomas Burr, supports this bill and believes that school-based health centers are the ideal model for administering mental health services and that adding Medicaid reimbursement and insurance coverage for these services will help to alleviate the continuing negative spike of children's mental health.

Connecticut Education Association, President, Kate Dias, supports this bill and to tapping into federal revenue to help pay for suicide risk assessments and mental health evaluations. This would continue to connect children to the resources they need.

AHMHCA, President, Fredrick Dombrowski, PhD, supports this bill and believes it is a very important piece of legislation. He suggests expanding the definition of "Licensed Mental Health Provider" that is included in the bill (bill expands to include LMSWs under this def.) to include "Licensed Professional Counselor Associate's (LPCA). This would streamline services and help to meet the demand of the children and families of our state.

CASBHC, Chair Legislative Committee, John Flanders, supports this bill and reminds the importance of school-based health centers. He reiterates his support and the work towards protecting children's mental and physical health.

Connecticut Association of Health Plans, Executive Director, Susan Halpin, comments on this bill and is weary of some of the language, most specifically, the removal of primary care physician's ability to conduct such exams. This may be unwise due to the continued workforce crisis. This may inadvertently reduce access instead of increasing. They suggest for the previously passed PA 22-47 to take shape and then assess necessity.

Community Health Wellness, BH Program Director, Jason Kersten, LCSW, supports this bill and shares details of the usefulness of school-based health centers with regards to students. They reiterate their support for this bill and the vital funding it introduces.

Connecticut Children's Care Network, Medical Director, David Krol, MD, MPH, FAAP, supports this bill and adds that it is critical to continue to create infrastructure to ensure that our progress continues down a positive path. Allowing School-Based Health Centers to receive this reimbursement will increase access to these important tools.

CASBHC, Executive Director, Melanie Wilde-Lane, supports this bill and the critical funding it will provide. They also request that primary care providers be included in the ability to bill for

these services. Schools, SBHCs, and Primary Care Providers should all be able to bill for these services.

Connecticut Association for Marriage & Family Therapy,

- Advocacy Chair, Jaime Rodriguez, LMFT,
- Chair, Rebecca Ruitto, LMFT

supports this bill and its inclusion of CT's six major mental health licensed providers. (LMFT, LCSW, LPC, APRN, LADC, and PA).

Resident of CT, Baileigh Johnson, supports this bill. After years of struggling with mental health they have become more involved in bills surrounding mental health. Giving insurance to students who need it the most lowers the stress of worrying about cost and creates a beneficial environment for everyone.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

**Reported by: Christian Talarski**

**Date: 3/10/23**