

Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-2

AN ACT CONCERNING THE MENTAL, PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL

Title: WELLNESS OF CHILDREN.

Vote Date: 2/28/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/21/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Committee on Children.

COSPONSORS OF BILL:

SEN. LOONEY, 11th Dist.; SEN. DUFF, 25th Dist. SEN. ANWAR, 3rd Dist.; SEN. CABRERA, 17th Dist. SEN. COHEN, 12th Dist.; SEN. FLEXER, 29th Dist. SEN. FONFARA, 1st Dist.; SEN. GASTON, 23rd Dist. SEN. HOCHADEL, 13th Dist.; SEN. KUSHNER, 24th Dist. SEN. LESSER, 9th Dist.; SEN. LOPES, 6th Dist. SEN. MAHER, 26th Dist.; SEN. MARONEY, 14th Dist. SEN. MARX, 20th Dist.; SEN. MCCRORY, 2nd Dist. SEN. MILLER P., 27th Dist.; SEN. MOORE, 22nd Dist. SEN. RAHMAN, 4th Dist.; SEN. SLAP, 5th Dist. SEN. WINFIELD, 10th Dist.; REP. DELANY, 144th Dist. REP. NOLAN, 39th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill aims to address the mental health crisis we are witnessing across the state. It does this by seeking to improve access to mental, physical, and emotional health services directed towards children, and provide continues support throughout the usage of these services.

This bill seeks to increase the workforce of the social work field to allow for greater and more personal care of those who need it. The bill lowers licensure costs and adds staffing to the licensure office. Birth to Three enrollees who speak Spanish to be entitled to a Spanish speaking provider or translator. It also includes mental health wellness days for all service staff and hourly workers to make sure our workforce is mentally healthy to provide critical support where we need it the most. This bill also establishes the Behavioral Health Advocate that will be a primary advocate of policies and laws for those in the field. This gives greater voice to those who work to help our children every day and ensure that they are properly represented in our legislature in the future.

S.B. 2 address's children's mental health by asking the Commissioner of Social Services to amend Medicaid to allow suicide risk assessments. This allows for an increase in assessments within School-based Health Centers and a greater "finger on the pulse" of our state. We also see in sections 17-19, improved access to an early intervention – through training of school behavioral health providers, that will give greater dynamics to our healthcare system.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

State Department of Education, State of Connecticut, Commissioner Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, supports this bill and specifically supports the inclusion of mental health wellness days for service staff and hourly workers, Medicaid reimbursement for suicide risk, the requirement of the department to hire a full-time employee to collaborate with non-profits who specifically deal with adolescent behavioral health (they do mention additional funding would be needed for the hire... they also add that in the bills current status the allotment of 15 thousand dollars for a nonprofit partner is insufficient, but are open to a continuing conversation on the bill).

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Senate Democrats support this bill and its ability to positively affect the children of Connecticut by giving them more resources to garner support throughout their lives.

Senate President Pro-Tempore, Senator Martin M. Looney, supports this bill and its positive effect it would have on the children of Connecticut.

- Rebecca Ruitto, Chair of CTAMFT
- Kristina Chomick, LMFT
- Julian Finnegan, LMFT
- Crystal Colon, LMFT
- Olivia Pace, LMFT
- Barbare E. Slim, LMFT
- Judith Hunt, LMFT
- Jessica Joseff, LMFT
- Amanda Kedzior, LMFT,

Supports this bill with crucial changes to licensure fees in Sections 13 & 14 in regards to the Social Worker licensure fees to be applied "across the board" to include Marriage and Family Therapists and Marriage and Family Therapist Associates.

Connecticut State Library, State Librarian, Deborah Schander, supports this bill but gives concern to the incentive grant to "sanctuary libraries" that is included in the bill. The concern that this grant may give opposite results allowing some communities to forgo the incentive to allow for intimidation and censorship. Instead, she recommends a conversation to discuss the previous grants included in statute (Section 11-24b: State grants to principal public libraries) that was established in 1967 that has been underfunded for almost a decade. They add that no state library has received any aid via this statute.

Mental Health Connecticut, President/CEO, Luis B. Perez, LCSW, supports the bill and its work towards eliminating barriers for behavioral healthcare providers. They support greater

access to care when we are in a time of staffing shortages, this allows providers less time dealing with barriers of payments and explanations and more time treating their patients of Connecticut.

Yale New Haven Health, Sr Government Relations Officer, Ann Hogan, supports this bill and attention towards improving child and adolescent behavioral healthcare system in our state. However, they want to prioritize investing into existing infrastructure of our health care system. These "gaps" that they mention include:

- Retaining and recruiting current workforce through examination and improvement of reimbursement of health services.
- Expanding access to inpatient and outpatient services by supporting additional funding as Medicaid increasingly doesn't cover inpatient and or outpatient care.
- Expand the Collaborative Care Management that was authorized last year that was intended to address the shortage of health workers and mental health crisis.

Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence, Policy Manager, Bridget Koestner, supports this bill and its incentivization of sanctuary public libraries that include books on gender identity, sexual orientation, and racial justice, adding these books are helpful and that banning these books are counterproductive. Support of multiple items in this bill are added and a suggestion of adding "a non-offending parent/guardian of a minor victim" in section beginning line 407, as this allows for a non-offending parent time off to care for their child.

CT Community Nonprofit Alliance, Senior Public Policy Advisor, Jeff Shaw, supports this bill and adding that sections 6 & 7 that provide family service plans in Spanish as it is critical to eliminate barriers to care.

CT Association of School Based Health Centers, Executive Director, Melanie Wilde-Lane, supports this bill and its section on Medicaid reimbursement for all risk assessments, this allows medical providers to conduct through assessments and be reimbursed for time.

Connecticut Library Association, Co-Chair, Legislative Committee, Olivia Scully, supports this bill and its language that supports principal public libraries and their ability to serve their community. They add that *CGS Sec. 11-24b – State grants to principal public libraries; incentive grants*, has been zeroed out and that consideration be made to appropriate new funds within S.B. 2.

Building Bridges, LLC, President, Steven Hunt, supports the bill and more specifically eliminating the expiration of the \$200 GAP/ Administrative payment provided to Birth to Three agencies. Leaving this payment allows for permanent allocation for qualifying enrollment.

ACLU Connecticut, Policy Council, Jess Zaccagnino, supports this bill and its work towards investing in our youth of the state. Funding for mental health care in schools is crucial and investing in libraries against the censorship against young people.

Connecticut Children's Medical Center, Chief Behavioral Health Officer, Howard Sovronsky, LCSW, supports this bill and its many avenues it uses to ensure that families and children have access to behavioral health services when and wherever they may need it.

Connecticut Association of Addiction Professionals, President, Susan C. Campion LADC LMFT, supports this bill and its goals towards funding and supporting those who need it the most such as those who saw an increase in mental health disorders, eating disorders, behavioral violence, and more. They suggest inclusions to the bill:

1. Inclusion and parity across all LMHP & LADCS in sections 1, 13 & 14
2. Adding personal policy that allows for mental health wellness days as a reason for using accrued sick day in a children services' setting.

NAMI Connecticut, Public Policy and Affiliates Relations Manager, Thomas Burr, supports this bill and its attention to providing the best possible care for those who may need it the most.

State of Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, Commissioner, Beth Bye, supports this bill and provides greater context to the Birth to Three System payment plan and references a study that is projected to be complete by 2024. OEC also voices support for Section 5, IFSP be translated in Spanish. However, they voice concern of their difficulty staffing Spanish speakers and that it would be unlikely without the help of outside contractors. (They estimate a 1.2 million allocation annually to cover Spanish-speaking contractors which they mention is not already allocated.)

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Christian Talarski

Date: 3/13/23