

ASSEMBLY HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 1176

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: FEBRUARY 3, 2022

The Assembly Higher Education Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 1176 with committee amendments.

Under the “Madison Holleran Suicide Prevention Act,” P.L.2016, c.18 (C.18A:3B-72 et seq.), institutions of higher education are required to have individuals with training and experience in mental health issues who focus on reducing student suicides and attempted suicides available on campus or remotely by telephone or other means for students 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The individuals also work with faculty and staff on ways to recognize the warning signs and risk factors associated with student suicide. This bill amends that law to also require the individuals to work with faculty and staff on recognizing the signs of depression and on the referral of students to crisis hotlines and mental health screenings and to provide annual training on all of these topics.

As amended, this bill provides that an institution of higher education may satisfy this requirement by providing each student with the hotline number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, the NJ Hopeline, or any 24/7 mental health hotline deemed appropriate by the Secretary of Higher Education. In addition to providing students with the hotline numbers, the institution is required to post the hotline numbers in each dormitory, library, and student center, and any other facility or area on campus that the institution determines to be appropriate.

The bill provides that a four-year institution of higher education will require all students who serve as resident assistants to receive annual training on the signs of depression, the warning signs and risk factors associated with college student suicide, the referral of students to campus mental health resources, and responding to students in crisis.

This bill also requires institutions to annually conduct a mental health public awareness campaign on campus designed to: provide students with information on depression and suicide; raise awareness about the mental health services available on and off campus; and reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health services.

The bill directs the president of an institution of higher education, or a designee, to establish a mental health crisis assessment and response plan. The plan will be the official protocol to be used by campus staff, faculty, and in the case of four-year institutions, resident assistants, to identify, assess, and respond to a student who is experiencing a mental health crisis.

The bill provides that no campus staff member, faculty member, or resident assistant at an institution of higher education will be held liable for any good faith act or omission consistent with the provisions of this section. For purposes of this bill, good faith does not include willful misconduct, gross negligence, or recklessness.

This bill was pre-filed for introduction in the 2022-2023 session pending technical review. As reported, the bill includes the changes required by technical review, which has been performed.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

The committee amended the bill to:

(1) provide that an institution of higher education may satisfy the requirement to transmit the mental health contact information to each student by providing each student with the hotline number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, the NJ Hopeline, or any 24/7 mental health hotline deemed appropriate by the Secretary of Higher Education. In addition to providing students with the hotline numbers, the institution is required to post the hotline numbers in each dormitory, library, and student center, and any other facility or area on campus that the institution determines to be appropriate;

(2) specify that no campus staff member, faculty member, or resident assistant at an institution of higher education will be held liable for any good faith act or omission consistent with the provisions of the bill. For purposes of the bill, good faith does not include willful misconduct, gross negligence, or recklessness and

(3) change the effective date from immediately to the first full academic year next following the date of enactment.