

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL ESTIMATE
ASSEMBLY, No. 3005
STATE OF NEW JERSEY
219th LEGISLATURE

DATED: NOVEMBER 17, 2021

SUMMARY

- Synopsis:** “Mental Health Early Action on Campus Act”; requires institutions of higher education to implement mental health programs and services.
- Type of Impact:** Annual expenditure increases to public institutions of higher education and the State.
- Agencies Affected:** The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education; public institutions of higher education.

Office of Legislative Services Estimate

Annual Fiscal Impact	
Cost Increases to Public Institutions of Higher Education	Indeterminate
State Cost Increases	Indeterminate

- The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) determines that this bill will result in indeterminate annual expenditure increases for public institutions of higher education. The expenditure increase will result from each institution meeting the requirements of the bill, which include: implementing mental health awareness programs; establishing student peer support programs; forming strategic partnerships with local mental health service providers; attaining certain clinical mental health staff-to-student ratios; and conducting certain program evaluations.
- Costs incurred by the public institutions as a result of the enactment of this bill will vary as certain institutions may already meet some or all of the requirements established in the bill.
- The bill will result in an annual, indeterminate expenditure increase to the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE), which will be required to develop a Technical Assistance Center to support the efforts of the public institutions of higher education.

BILL DESCRIPTION

This bill requires institutions of higher education to implement certain mental health programs and services.

The bill requires an institution of higher education to implement a mental health awareness program which must include, at a minimum: the development and implementation of an annual student orientation session designed to raise awareness about mental health conditions; the assessment of courses and seminars and the implementation of mental health curricula if opportunities for integration exist; the creation and prominent display of information dedicated specifically to the mental health resources available to students on campus and in the surrounding community; the distribution of messages related to various mental health resources; and the implementation of an on-line screening tool to raise awareness and establish a mechanism to link or refer students to services.

The bill requires the governing board of an institution of higher education to establish an expert panel to develop and implement policies and procedures related to mental health awareness and training. It requires all student advisors, resident assistants in student housing facilities, and campus security personnel to participate in a national Mental Health First Aid training course or a similar program prior to the commencement of their duties.

The bill requires an institution of higher education to establish and implement a student peer support program that will utilize certain best practices for peer support. The program will utilize student peers to support students living with mental health conditions on campus. Peer support programs may be housed within resident assistance programs, counseling centers, or wellness centers on campus.

The bill also requires each institution to form strategic partnerships with local mental health service providers to improve overall campus mental health wellness and augment on-campus capacity. The partnerships will include linkage agreements with off-campus mental health service providers that establish a foundation for referrals for students when a student's mental health needs cannot be met on campus due to capacity concerns or preference of the student. Through a combination of on-campus capacity, off-campus linkage agreements with mental health service providers, and contracted telehealth therapy services, each institution is required to attempt to reach a benchmark ratio of one clinical, non-student staff member to 1,250 students.

Under the bill, the Secretary of Higher Education will develop a Technical Assistance Center. The center's responsibilities will include: developing standardized policies for medical leave related to mental health conditions for students, providing tailored support to the institutions in reviewing policies related to students living with mental health conditions and their academic standing; establishing initial standards for policies and procedures of expert panels established by governing boards under the bill; disseminating best practices concerning peer support programs; and developing Statewide standards and best practices for partnerships between local mental health agencies and institutions of higher education.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

None received.

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES

The OLS determines that this bill will result in indeterminate annual expenditure increases to public institutions of higher education. The institutions will likely incur costs to meet the requirements of the bill, which include: implementing mental health awareness programs;

establishing student peer support programs; forming strategic partnerships with local mental health service providers; and conducting certain program evaluations. Costs incurred by the public institutions will vary as certain institutions may already meet some or all of the requirements established in the bill. Notably, certain institutions may experience significant increases in salary costs to meet the bill's provision that requires each institution to attempt to reach a benchmark ratio of one clinical, non-student staff member to 1,250 students. The OLS does not have access to a source of information that details the inventory of mental health services and programs offered by each public institution of higher education in the State or the clinical, non-student staff employed by each institution.

The OLS notes that legislation substantially similar in nature to this bill was enacted in Illinois in August 2019. The Illinois Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability (CGFA), in making recommendations to the Illinois General Assembly on the amount of funds needed to implement the law, distributed a survey to Illinois public universities and community colleges requesting information on how well each institution's current mental health programs meet the requirements of the law and how much additional funding would be necessary to fully implement the law. The survey results indicate that, in the aggregate, Illinois' 13 public universities are estimated to incur costs between \$5.6 million and \$5.8 million annually over three years to implement the law. Meanwhile, Illinois' 45 community colleges have an estimated aggregate cost of implementation of between \$11.8 million and \$12.7 million per year.

The survey findings indicate that the highest-cost provision of the law was meeting a benchmark ratio of one clinical, non-student staff member to every 1,250 students. While four of the 13 universities and eight of the community colleges responded that they had mostly or fully implemented this goal, the survey responses indicated that the universities in total would incur additional costs of between \$2.5 million and \$2.8 million annually over three years and the community colleges would incur between \$7.7 million and \$8.2 million annually over three years to meet this particular mandate (although the latter range is on the low side due to the data not taking into account the five community colleges that did not respond to the survey). For the purposes of comparing student populations in Illinois and New Jersey, the OLS notes that, according to the federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, enrollment in public institutions of higher education in New Jersey is roughly two-thirds that of Illinois.

The survey conducted by the Illinois CGFA further indicated that the establishment of a Technical Assistance Center would annually cost between \$317,000 (if a "minimalist" Technical Assistance Center is established) and \$1.3 million (if a "robust" Technical Assistance Center is established). The OLS notes that, if the OSHE determines to staff the technical assistance center in a manner consistent with the way it currently staffs other programs housed in the Academic and Student Programs portion of the office, the State may expect to annually incur total personnel costs ranging between \$300,000 and \$450,000. The OSHE may experience additional costs to the extent it would need office space, supplies, and other materials for the Technical Assistance Center.

Section: Education

*Analyst: Christopher Myles
Associate Fiscal Analyst*

*Approved: Thomas Koenig
Legislative Budget and Finance Officer*

This legislative fiscal estimate has been produced by the Office of Legislative Services due to the failure of the Executive Branch to respond to our request for a fiscal note.

This fiscal estimate has been prepared pursuant to P.L.1980, c.67 (C.52:13B-6 et seq.).