

# ASSEMBLY HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

## STATEMENT TO

### ASSEMBLY, No. 3005

# STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: DECEMBER 14, 2020

The Assembly Higher Education Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 3005.

This bill, known as the “Mental Health Early Action on Campus Act,” requires institutions of higher education to implement certain mental health programs and services.

Under the bill, an institution of higher education is required to implement a mental health awareness program which must include, at a minimum:

(1) the development and implementation of an annual student orientation session designed to raise awareness about mental health conditions;

(2) the assessment of courses and seminars available to students through their regular academic experience and the implementation of mental health curricula if opportunities for integration exist;

(3) the creation and prominent display on the institution’s website or mobile application of information dedicated specifically to the mental health resources available to students on campus and in the surrounding community;

(4) the distribution of messages related to mental health resources that encourage help-seeking behavior through the on-line learning platform of the institution at least once per term and during periods of high stress in the academic year; and

(5) 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 an institution of higher education to establish and implement a student peer support program. 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. A peer support program will utilize best practices for peer support including, but not limited to:

(1) utilizing the tenets of the recovery model for mental health developed by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration;

(2) adequate planning and preparation, including standardizing guidance and practices, identifying needs of the target population, and aligning program goals to meet those needs;

(3) clearly articulating policies, specifically concerning role boundaries and confidentiality;

(4) systematic screening with defined selection criteria for peer supporters including, but not limited to, communication skills, leadership ability, character, previous experience or training, and ability to serve as a positive role model;

(5) identifying benefits from peer status including, but not limited to, experiential learning, social support, leadership, and improved self-confidence;

(6) continuing education for peer supporters to support each other and improve peer support skills; and

(7) flexibility in availability by offering services through drop-in immediate support and the ability to book appointments.

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. The partnerships will include:

(1) avenues for on-campus and off-campus mental health service providers to increase visibility to students via marketing and outreach;

(2) opportunities to engage the student body through student outreach initiatives including, but not limited to, mindfulness workshops or campus-wide wellness fairs; and

(3) opportunities to support mental health awareness and training.

Under the bill, the Secretary of Higher Education will develop a Technical Assistance Center. The center's responsibilities will include:

(1) developing standardized policies for medical leave related to mental health conditions for students, which may be adopted by an institution of higher education;

(2) providing tailored support to the institutions in reviewing policies related to students living with mental health conditions and their academic standing;

(3) establishing initial standards for policies and procedures of the expert panel;

(4) disseminating best practices concerning peer support programs, including widely-accepted selection criteria for individuals serving in a peer support role; and

(5) developing Statewide standards and best practices for partnerships between local mental health agencies and institutions of higher education.