

**Delaware House of Representatives**

**Rep. Valerie Longhurst**

**For Immediate Release:**

**June 16, 2022**

**House Passes Bill to Expand Mental Health Services**

**at Delaware Schools**

*HB 300 would lower ratios of students to school counselors*

DOVER – The House continued its efforts to address the mental health crisis gripping the state, passing legislation Thursday that would increase the number of mental health practitioners in Delaware middle schools.

Sponsored by **House Majority Leader Valerie** Longhurst, House Bill 300 would create new positions for school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists in all Delaware middle schools, effectively lowering the ratio of students to mental health practitioners. The bill builds on the successful passage last year of House Bill 100, which created a structure to place these practitioners in every elementary school statewide.

“We are in the midst of a mental health crisis in Delaware that began well before the pandemic and has only accelerated in the last two years. Anyone who has paid attention to this issue should be alarmed at the especially brutal toll this crisis has taken on our children,” said **Rep. Longhurst**. “Teachers across the state are seeing it every day in their classrooms. So many of their students come to school with significant unmet needs that impact their ability to learn, such as hunger, homelessness, trauma, and other untreated mental health issues. Without adequate resources to support our students, these challenges create the kind of disruptions in school that impact learning and affect all students.”

HB 300 would establish a mental health services unit for Delaware middle schools, phased in over three years, beginning in fiscal 2023. When fully implemented, the measure would arrive at a final ratio of a full-time school counselor, school social worker, or licensed clinical social worker for every 250 full-time equivalent students grades 6-8. Additionally, a unit ratio of a full-time school psychologist for every 700 full-time equivalent students.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in five youth are affected by a mental health disorder, and untreated mental illness has been shown to lead to increased risk of dropout, homelessness, substance abuse, chronic illnesses, incarceration, and possibly suicide. However, students with access to mental health services in school-based health centers are 10 times more likely to seek care for mental health or substance abuse than youth without access.

“On a day in which the Delaware Senate passed a package of bills to curb gun violence in the First State, it is fitting that the House also advanced legislation to address the mental health crisis in our state,” said **Sen. Marie Pinkney**, the Senate prime sponsor of HB 300. “Having school-based social workers, psychologists and mental health counselors at the ready to help our young people grapple with the trauma and undiagnosed mental, behavioral and developmental disorders so many of our young people face every day will help them to develop the kinds of healthy coping skills that are just as important later in life as their classroom lessons.”

Earlier this month, the House passed House Bill 303, which would guarantee insurance coverage for an annual, pre-deductible visit with a licensed mental health clinician with at least a master’s degree.

HB 300 now heads to the Senate for consideration.

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