

**Delaware House of Representatives**

**Rep. Valerie Longhurst**

**For Immediate Release:**

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**Bills Would Guarantee Coverage for Mental Health Visits,
Further Expand Services at Delaware Schools**

*Legislation aims to treat mental health the same as physical health,
lower ratios of students to school counselors*

DOVER – The House passed legislation Tuesday that would require Delaware health insurers to cover a yearly Behavioral Health Well Check for every insured person, putting mental health on par with other routinely covered preventive health services such as an annual physical or cancer screening.

Sponsored by **House Majority Leader Valerie Longhurst**, House Bill 303 would guarantee insurance coverage for an annual, pre-deductible visit with a licensed mental health clinician with at least a master’s degree. The Behavioral Health Well Check must include a review of medical history, evaluation of adverse childhood experiences and use of a validated mental health screening tool.

“We know that unaddressed trauma leads to lifelong mental health challenges, substance use disorders, as well as higher rates of incarceration and negative health behaviors, including suicide. Untreated mental health issues impact a person’s physical health and create costly outcomes over the course of their lifetime. These costs ripple throughout our health care system, our criminal justice system, and our economy at large,” said **Rep. Longhurst**, D-Bear.

“We encourage people all the time to get an annual physical, enroll in a diabetes prevention program, schedule a mammogram, see your gynecologist, get screened for colon cancer, the list goes on. These are all covered by insurance. Our mental health is just as important as our physical health.”

Every dollar invested in mental health can yield up to 10 times the savings in health care, criminal and juvenile justice, and lost productivity, according to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.

For example, an annual Behavioral Health Well Check could diagnose someone with mild depression, which can be treated with therapy. But severe depression that goes undetected could require longer term treatment, costly medication and even more intensive services.

“We can’t begin to address the mental health crisis in this nation until we make sure everyone has access to affordable mental health services,” said **Sen. Nicole Poore**, prime Senate sponsor of HB 303. “This legislation takes a major step forward in that effort by making Behavioral Health Well Check as routine and accessible as an annual visit to your primary care doctor. I want to commend Rep. Longhurst for putting mental health at the center of her legislative agenda for the welfare of all Delawareans.”

HB 303 now heads to the Senate for consideration.

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