



Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

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Memorandum in Support

A.2136 (Fernandez)

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to requiring certain persons receive mental health training each year

The Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) supports A.2136 (Fernandez), which would require all holders of professional certificates in the classroom teaching service, all holders of a level III teaching assistant certificates, and all holders of professional certificates in educational leadership service to receive three hours of mental health training annually.

Anxiety and depression (among other mental illnesses) are rising among school-age youth. According to NIMH the lifetime prevalence rates of mental illness among 13 to 18 year olds is 21% with severe impact and 46% with mild, moderate or severe impact. Therefore, nearly half of youth in this age range has experienced some level of mental health challenge. Left untreated, these conditions can result in poor academic performance, substance use and addiction, legal problems and most tragically, self-harm and suicide. In fact, the suicide rate among youth has risen by 56% between 2007 and 2016.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has exacerbated these challenges adding additional stress to schools' capacity to meet the mental and emotional health needs of students. Closed school buildings, social distancing and adaptation to virtual learning stress students, teachers and parents. The Pandemic has created an unprecedented need for mental health literacy throughout the school body.

Legislation signed into law in 2016 now requires all schools in New York State to teach students in grades K-12 about mental health from a mental health literacy perspective as part of the school health curriculum. Teachers and other school personnel, however, are not currently required to have any training in mental health.

As students begin to learn more about mental health it is vital that teachers, administrators and school support personnel have similar training. A shared knowledge of mental health across the school community helps promote a school culture and climate of wellness that benefits everyone in schools as well as families and the community at large. This bill would require educators to receive, at minimum, three hours of mental health training per year. This training will prepare them to handle the rising mental health crisis among our youth and take steps to address mental health concerns among their students.

For all of the aforementioned reasons MHANYS urges the Legislature to pass A.2136.

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