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**Memorandum in Support  
S.3627-A (Fernandez)/A.3041-A (Kelles)**

*AN ACT to amend the education law and the mental hygiene law, in relation to requiring training for teachers and administrators in the area of mental health response training.*

MHANYS strongly supports the enactment of S.3627-A (Fernandez)/A.3041-A (Kelles), which would require teachers and administrators to receive mental health response training consistent with the advances New York has made in increasing student mental health literacy.

In 2016, New York State became the first state in the nation to enact a law requiring all schools to teach students in grades K-12 about mental health from a mental health literacy perspective as part of the school health curriculum. Building on this foundation, the Governor's proposed 2026-27 Executive Budget includes a \$17 million investment to expand Youth and Teen Mental Health First Aid in high schools. This additional investment and expansion will continue to position New York State as a leader in raising mental health literacy among our youth. The significance of this proposal is captured in these words from the State of the State book, "By investing in our young people, New York will equip students with the basic skills needed to support themselves and their peers, drive lasting cultural change in addressing mental health stigma, and ensure students graduating high school have been equipped with crucial mental health skills."

However, teachers and other school personnel are not currently required to have any training in mental health, resulting in school environments wherein student knowledge about mental health exceeds that of their educators. The need for mental health training is undeniable. Anxiety and depression (among other mental illnesses) are rising among school-age youth. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (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. A 2023 article of Education Weekly reports on teachers' serious concerns about their students' mental health and not feeling they have knowledge or skills to support and help. One recent study found that, while 93 percent of teachers are concerned about student mental health needs, 85 percent expressed the need for further mental health training.

School superintendents testify to the importance of the mental/emotional health of students in their schools. A comprehensive survey conducted by the New York State Council of School Superintendents in 2024 found that 98% of superintendents indicated that they have a high or moderate level of concern. This included 67% of superintendents indicating a high level of concern. As Governor Hochul said, "As a state and a nation, we are facing a mental health crisis among our youth. It's a time for action to fix it."

This legislation is careful not to create an expectation that educators either diagnose students or provide counseling to students. Consistent with mental health literacy best practices, the training under this legislation is public health oriented and includes elements such as: the recognition of signs and symptoms of present or developing mental health crises or illnesses; the appropriate response to mental health crisis; and, the sharing of mental health supports and resources. Training of this nature takes advantage of teachers' consistent, daily observation of students without pathologizing them.

As students begin to learn more about mental health it is vital that teachers and other school 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.

MHANYS strongly supports the enactment of S.3627-A (Fernandez)/A.3041-A (Kelles) and urges the Legislature to pass it into law.

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