

**SENATE, No. 1515**

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**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

**210th LEGISLATURE**

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INTRODUCED MAY 13, 2002

**Sponsored by:**

**Senator PETER A. INVERSO**

**District 14 (Mercer and Middlesex)**

**SYNOPSIS**

Requires reporting by certain persons of attempted or completed suicides, establishes NJ Suicide Prevention Advisory Council; appropriates \$400,000.

**CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT**

As introduced.



1 AN ACT concerning suicide, supplementing Title 30 of the Revised  
2 Statutes, repealing section 6 of P.L.1985, c.195, and making an  
3 appropriation.  
4

5 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*  
6 *of New Jersey:*  
7

8 1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

9 a. Overall, suicide is the 11th leading cause of death for all  
10 Americans and the third leading cause of death for young people ages  
11 15 to 24. Suicide took the lives of 30,535 Americans in 1997. This  
12 number is over 50% higher than the number of homicides reported  
13 nationwide for that same year. Nearly 500,000 people require  
14 emergency room treatment each year as a result of an attempted  
15 suicide.

16 b. During the period from 1952 to 1995, the incidence of suicide  
17 among adolescents and young adults nearly tripled. During the period  
18 from 1980 to 1997, the rate of suicide among persons ages 15 to 19  
19 increased by 11% and among persons ages 10 to 14 by 109%.  
20 Although suicide among young children is a rare event, the dramatic  
21 increase in the rate among persons ages 10 to 14 underscores the  
22 urgent need for intensifying efforts to prevent suicide among persons  
23 in this age group. It is also widely reported that the risk for attempted  
24 or completed suicide varies with race, religion, age and sexual identity.

25 c. In 1996, 72 persons under the age of 25 committed suicide in  
26 New Jersey, and every month at least 127 young people in this State  
27 attempt suicide. Over 40% of the suicide attempts of minors are  
28 second or subsequent attempts. Non-fatal suicide attempts outnumber  
29 suicide death and often result in significant medical and economic  
30 costs, and in physical, emotional and psychological damage. Like  
31 suicide deaths, however, suicide attempts are generally under-  
32 reported.

33 d. It is estimated that fewer than 25% of suicide attempts are  
34 reported. When they are reported, the reaction often makes the person  
35 less likely to seek further help. Suicide evokes complicated and  
36 uncomfortable reactions that stigmatize the survivors and increase  
37 their burden of hurt, isolation and secrecy. This secrecy also tends to  
38 diminish the accuracy and amount of information available about  
39 persons who have attempted or completed suicides, which information  
40 could help suicide prevention efforts.

41 e. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a program in this State to:  
42 collect information about those who attempt suicide and improve the  
43 information available to both professionals, who are in contact with  
44 persons at risk of suicide, and individuals and families at risk; identify  
45 and provide suitable intervention services to reduce the incidence of  
46 suicide; and educate children and families at risk about the resources

1 available for suicide prevention and intervention.

2

3 2. As used in this act:

4 "Attempted suicide" means destructive behavior intended by the  
5 actor to result in the actor's harm or death.

6 "Certified Domestic Violence Specialist" means a person who has  
7 fulfilled the requirements of certification as a Domestic Violence  
8 Specialist established by the New Jersey Association of Domestic  
9 Violence Professionals.

10 "Completed suicide" means a death that is known or reasonably  
11 suspected to have resulted from an intentional act of the deceased,  
12 regardless of whether it has been ruled a suicide by a medical  
13 examiner.

14 "Council" means the New Jersey Suicide Prevention Advisory  
15 Council established pursuant to this act.

16 "Division" means the Division of Mental Health Services in the  
17 Department of Human Services.

18 "Substance abuse counselor" means a person who is certified by an  
19 appropriate professional organization to provide substance abuse  
20 counseling for the prevention of substance abuse, including alcohol  
21 abuse.

22 "Teaching staff member" means a member of the professional staff  
23 of any school district, regional board of education or the board of  
24 trustees of a charter school, or any board of education of a county  
25 vocational school, who holds an office, position or employment of  
26 such character that the qualifications for the office, position or  
27 employment require the member to hold a valid and effective standard,  
28 provisional or emergency certificate, appropriate to the member's  
29 office, position or employment, issued by the State Board of  
30 Examiners. Teaching staff member includes a school nurse and a  
31 school athletic trainer.

32

33 3. a. Any teaching staff member, who, as a result of information  
34 obtained in the course of the person's employment, has reasonable  
35 cause to suspect or believe that a student has attempted or completed  
36 suicide, shall promptly report such information to the division in a  
37 form and manner prescribed by the division.

38 b. A nonpublic school is encouraged to require any member of its  
39 professional staff, who, as a result of information obtained in the  
40 course of the person's employment, has reasonable cause to suspect or  
41 believe that a student has attempted or completed suicide, to promptly  
42 report such information to the division in a form and manner  
43 prescribed by the division.

44 As used in this subsection, "nonpublic school" means an elementary  
45 or secondary school within the State, other than a public school,  
46 offering education in grades K-12 or any combination thereof, at

1 which a child may legally fulfill compulsory school attendance  
2 requirements.

3 c. Any licensed psychologist, social worker, marriage and family  
4 therapist, professional counselor, physician, physician assistant, or  
5 registered nurse or licensed practical nurse licensed in this State  
6 pursuant to Title 45 of the Revised Statutes, who, as a result of  
7 information obtained in the course of the person's employment, has  
8 reasonable cause to suspect or believe that an individual has attempted  
9 or completed suicide, shall promptly report such information to the  
10 division in a form and manner prescribed by the division.

11 d. Any public health official, probation officer, employee of the  
12 Superior Court, Chancery Division, Family Part, substance abuse  
13 counselor, Certified Domestic Violence Specialist, or member of a  
14 professional group identified by the council as having a likelihood to  
15 know about suicide attempts and deaths, who, as a result of  
16 information obtained in the course of the person's employment, has  
17 reasonable cause to suspect or believe that an individual has attempted  
18 or completed suicide, is encouraged to promptly report such  
19 information to the division in a form and manner prescribed by the  
20 division.

21 e. The reporting form established by the division shall not require  
22 the reporter to identify the student or individual by name or other  
23 unique identifier, but may require that the reporter supply non-  
24 identifying demographic information about the student or individual,  
25 other attempts made by the student or individual and the response or  
26 referral made to deal with the incident.

27 f. The reporting form shall be submitted to a designated employee  
28 of the division with responsibility for compiling data from the reports.  
29 Information contained in the reports shall not be considered a public  
30 record, but the division may aggregate the data for the purpose of  
31 preparing an annual report pursuant to section 6 of this act.

32 g. The division shall offer to provide persons who are required or  
33 encouraged to report an attempted or completed suicide with current  
34 information about public and private assistance available to survivors  
35 and families of attempted and completed suicides and professionals  
36 who deal with suicide.

37 h. The reporting of an attempted or completed suicide pursuant to  
38 this section shall not replace or alter any other requirement of law or  
39 professional standard or obligation that requires a person to evaluate  
40 a death or report an attempted or completed suicide.

41 i. Any person who reports an attempted or completed suicide  
42 pursuant to this act shall have immunity from any civil or criminal  
43 liability on account of that report, unless the person has acted in bad  
44 faith or with malicious purpose.

1 j. No provision of this act shall be deemed to require the disclosure  
2 of, or penalize the failure to disclose, any information which would be  
3 privileged pursuant to the provisions of sections 18 through 23,  
4 inclusive, of P.L.1960, c.52 (C.2A:84A-18 through 2A:84A-23).

5  
6 4. There is established in the Department of Human Services the  
7 New Jersey Suicide Prevention Advisory Council.

8 a. The purpose of the council shall be to: examine existing needs  
9 and services and make recommendations to the division for suicide  
10 reporting, prevention and intervention, giving priority to  
11 recommendations concerning prevention and education for children  
12 and young adults; advise the division on the content of informational  
13 materials to be made available to persons who report attempted or  
14 completed suicides; and advise the division in the development of  
15 regulations required pursuant to this act.

16 b. The council shall consist of 17 members as follows:

17 (1) the Commissioners of Human Services, Health and Senior  
18 Services, and Education, the executive director of the Juvenile Justice  
19 Commission established pursuant to P.L.1995, c.284 (C.52:17B-169  
20 et seq.) and the chairman of the Community Mental Health Citizens  
21 Advisory Board established pursuant to P.L.1957, c.146 (C.30:9A-1  
22 et seq.), or their designees, who shall serve ex officio;

23 (2) six public members appointed by the Governor, as follows: one  
24 person who is a current member of a county mental health advisory  
25 board, one person with personal or family experience with suicide, one  
26 person who is a current or retired primary or secondary school  
27 teacher, one person who is a current or former member of a local  
28 board of education and two persons with professional experience in  
29 the collection and reporting of social science data;

30 (3) three public members appointed by the President of the Senate,  
31 no more than two of whom are members of the same political party,  
32 who have volunteer or paid experience in the provision of services to  
33 survivors of suicide or people at risk of attempting suicide; and

34 (4) three public members appointed by the Speaker of the General  
35 Assembly, no more than two of whom are members of the same  
36 political party, who each have knowledge of and interest in the  
37 prevention of suicide and the provision of education about suicide to  
38 high-risk populations, including children and young adults, senior  
39 citizens and religious, racial, ethnic or sexual minorities.

40 c. The public members shall be appointed no later than 60 days after  
41 the date of enactment of this act.

42 d. The public members shall serve for a term of five years; but, of  
43 the members first appointed, three shall serve for a term of two years,  
44 three for a term of three years, three for a term of four years and three  
45 for a term of five years. Members are eligible for reappointment upon  
46 the expiration of their terms. Vacancies in the membership of the

1 council shall be filled in the same manner provided for the original  
2 appointments.

3 e. The council shall organize as soon as practicable following the  
4 appointment of its members and shall select a chairperson and vice-  
5 chairperson from among the members. The chairperson shall appoint  
6 a secretary who need not be a member of the council.

7 f. The public members shall serve without compensation, but shall  
8 be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in the performance of  
9 their duties and within the limits of funds available to the council.

10 g. The council shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail  
11 itself of the services of the employees of any State, county or  
12 municipal department, board, bureau, commission or agency as it may  
13 require and as may be available to it for its purposes.

14 h. The Department of Human Services shall provide staff support  
15 to the council.

16

17 5. The Commissioner of Human Services shall develop and  
18 publicize, in consultation with the council, a public awareness  
19 campaign on suicide prevention and intervention, the goals of which  
20 shall be to:

21 a. increase voluntary reporting of suicides and attempts at suicide  
22 by professionals who are likely to know of suicides and attempts in the  
23 course of their employment;

24 b. increase referrals by these professionals to therapeutic services  
25 available to people who contemplate or attempt suicide;

26 c. increase public awareness of the incidence and causes of suicide  
27 attempts and decrease the stigma currently associated with depression  
28 and suicide; and

29 d. encourage the use by families of short-term and long-term public  
30 and private mental health services, as well as other services, to reduce  
31 the incidence of attempted and completed suicides.

32

33 6. a. The division shall compile data about reported attempted and  
34 completed suicides by youth in the State, without identifying any  
35 individuals involved.

36 b. The Commissioner of Human Services shall issue a report  
37 annually to the council, the Governor and the Legislature containing  
38 a summary of the data compiled by the division that includes aggregate  
39 demographic information about youth who attempt or complete  
40 suicide. The report shall include any recommendations for legislation  
41 or regulatory changes that would aid in the collection of more accurate  
42 data or the provision of more effective suicide prevention and  
43 intervention.

44 c. The commissioner shall provide specific findings about youth  
45 suicides and attempts to the council, as soon as possible, to assist the  
46 council in fulfilling its responsibility under this act to make

1 recommendations about suicide prevention and intervention within that  
2 population.

3  
4 7. The Commissioner of Human Services, pursuant to the  
5 "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et  
6 seq.), shall adopt regulations to carry out the purposes of this act.

7  
8 8. Section 6 of P.L.1985, c.195 (C.30:9A-17) is repealed.

9  
10 9. There is appropriated \$400,000 from the General Fund to the  
11 Department of Human Services to carry out the purposes of this act.

12  
13 10. This act shall take effect immediately.

14  
15  
16 STATEMENT

17  
18 This bill establishes a suicide prevention and reporting program in  
19 the Division of Mental Health Services in the Department of Human  
20 Services. The purpose of the program is to: collect information about  
21 those who attempt suicide and improve the information available to  
22 both professionals, who are in contact with persons at risk of suicide,  
23 and individuals and families at risk; identify and provide suitable  
24 intervention services to reduce the incidence of suicide; and educate  
25 children and families at risk about the resources available for suicide  
26 prevention and intervention.

27 With respect to reporting suicide attempts or completed suicides,  
28 the bill:

29 C requires any teaching staff member (in a public school), who, as a  
30 result of information obtained in the course of the person's  
31 employment, has reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a  
32 student has attempted or completed suicide, to promptly report the  
33 information to the Division of Mental Health Services. The bill also  
34 encourages a nonpublic school to require any member of its  
35 professional staff to make these reports;

36 C requires any licensed psychologist, social worker, marriage and  
37 family therapist, professional counselor, physician, physician  
38 assistant, or registered or licensed practical nurse in this State, who,  
39 as a result of information obtained in the course of the person's  
40 employment, has reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a  
41 person has attempted or completed suicide, to promptly report the  
42 information to the division; and

43 C encourages any public health official, probation officer, employee  
44 of the Family Court, substance abuse counselor, Certified Domestic  
45 Violence Specialist, or member of a professional group identified  
46 by the New Jersey Suicide Prevention Advisory Council

1 (established in the bill) as having a likelihood to know about  
2 suicide attempts and deaths, who, as a result of information  
3 obtained in the course of the person's employment, has reasonable  
4 cause to suspect or believe that a person has attempted or  
5 completed suicide, to report the information to the division.

6 The reporting form established by the division, pursuant to this bill,  
7 shall not require the reporter to identify the person by name or other  
8 unique identifier, but may require that the reporter supply non-  
9 identifying demographic information about the person, other attempts  
10 made by the person and the response or referral made to deal with the  
11 incident. Also, the bill requires the division to offer to provide persons  
12 who are required or encouraged to report an attempted or completed  
13 suicide with current information about public and private assistance  
14 available to survivors and families of attempted and completed suicides  
15 and professionals who deal with suicide.

16 Any person who reports an attempted or completed suicide  
17 pursuant to this bill shall have immunity from any civil or criminal  
18 liability on account of that report, unless the person has acted in bad  
19 faith or with malicious purpose.

20 The bill establishes a 17-member New Jersey Suicide Prevention  
21 Advisory Council in the Department of Human Services. The purpose  
22 of the council is to: examine existing needs and services and make  
23 recommendations to the division for suicide reporting, prevention and  
24 intervention, giving priority to recommendations concerning  
25 prevention and education for children and young adults; advise the  
26 division on the content of informational materials to be made available  
27 to persons who report attempted or completed suicides; and advise the  
28 division in the development of regulations required pursuant to this  
29 bill.

30 The members of the council shall include:

31 C the Commissioners of Human Services, Health and Senior Services,  
32 and Education, the executive director of the Juvenile Justice  
33 Commission and the chairman of the Community Mental Health  
34 Citizens Advisory Board, or their designees, who shall serve ex  
35 officio;

36 C six public members appointed by the Governor, as follows: one  
37 person who is a current member of a county mental health advisory  
38 board, one person with personal or family experience with suicide,  
39 one person who is a current or retired primary or secondary school  
40 teacher, one person who is a current or former member of a local  
41 board of education and two persons with professional experience  
42 in the collection and reporting of social science data;

43 C three public members appointed by the President of the Senate who  
44 have volunteer or paid experience in the provision of services to  
45 survivors of suicide or people at risk of attempting suicide; and

46 C three public members appointed by the Speaker of the General



**S1515 INVERSO**

9

1 Assembly who each have knowledge of and interest in the  
2 prevention of suicide and the provision of education about suicide  
3 to high-risk populations, including children and young adults, senior  
4 citizens and religious, racial, ethnic or sexual minorities.

5 The bill also directs the Commissioner of Human Services to  
6 develop and publicize, in consultation with the council, a public  
7 awareness campaign on suicide prevention and intervention, the goals  
8 of which shall be to:

9 - increase voluntary reporting of suicides and attempts at suicide  
10 by professionals who are likely to know of suicides and attempts in the  
11 course of their employment;

12 - increase referrals by these professionals to therapeutic services  
13 available to people who contemplate or attempt suicide;

14 - increase public awareness of the incidence and causes of suicide  
15 attempts and decrease the stigma currently associated with depression  
16 and suicide; and

17 - encourage the use by families of short-term and long-term public  
18 and private mental health services, as well as other services, to reduce  
19 the incidence of attempted and completed suicides.

20 The Division of Mental Health Services is directed to compile data  
21 about reported attempted and completed suicides by youth in the  
22 State, without identifying any individuals involved. The Commissioner  
23 of Human Services is directed to issue a report annually to the council,  
24 the Governor and the Legislature containing a summary of the data  
25 compiled by the division that includes aggregate demographic  
26 information about youth who attempt or complete suicide. The report  
27 shall include any recommendations for legislation or regulatory  
28 changes that would aid in the collection of more accurate data or the  
29 provision of more effective suicide prevention and intervention.

30 The bill repeals N.J.S.A.30:9A-17, which established a Youth  
31 Suicide Prevention Advisory Council in 1985, because the work of  
32 that council is completed.

33 Finally, the bill appropriates \$400,000 from the General Fund to the  
34 Department of Human Services to carry out the purposes of the bill.