

# SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

## STATEMENT TO

### SENATE, No. 2843

# STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MARCH 4, 2019

The Senate Education Committee favorably reports Senate Bill No. 2843.

This bill establishes a \$1 million grant program in the Department of Education to assist school districts in the hiring of school psychologists. The purposes of the grant program are to address shortages of student support services in New Jersey schools, ensure that mental health services are available at school for students who may otherwise lack access to such services, improve student achievement, and improve school climate and school safety.

Under the bill, the Commissioner of Education will award grants to school districts on a competitive basis. School districts that wish to apply for the grant program will submit an application in accordance with procedures and requirements prescribed by the commissioner. Grant applications must include information on the following: (1) the school district's unmet need for student support services; (2) the number of school psychologists currently employed by the district and their caseloads; (3) the existing ratio of school psychologists to students enrolled in the district; (4) the schools and student populations that will be served by the hiring of additional school psychologists with grant funds; (5) the school district's attendance rates and graduation rates; (6) the percentage of students enrolled in the district who are eligible for the federal free or reduced price lunch programs; and (7) any other information specified by the commissioner. The commissioner will establish selection criteria for the awarding of grants, including consideration of the information contained in the applications, and will determine the amount for each grant that is approved.

The bill requires each school district that receives a grant under the program to submit a report to the commissioner within one year after receiving the grant. The report will contain information on the school district's use of the grant funds, including information on the number of school psychologists hired, increases or improvements in the provision of student support services as a result of the grant, and any notable changes in school climate, attendance rates, student achievement, school discipline, or other measures since receiving the grant.

The bill also requires the commissioner to submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature no later than two years after the establishment of the grant program. The report will include information on the number of grant applicants, the number and amounts of the grant awards, information provided by school districts in their reports to the commissioner regarding the use of grant funds, and any recommendations concerning the continuation or expansion of the grant program.

The bill appropriates the sum of \$1 million from the General Fund to the Department of Education for purposes of the grant program established under the bill.