

ASSEMBLY BILL NO. 4433
(Second Reprint)

To the Senate:

Pursuant to Article V, Section I, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution, I herewith return Assembly Bill No. 4433 (Second Reprint) with my recommendations for reconsideration.

Assembly Bill No. 4433 (Second Reprint) creates a grant program to encourage school districts to partner with institutions of higher education in training school-based mental health services providers in order to expand the pipeline of high-quality, well-trained providers and address the shortage of mental health professionals in school districts. School districts that receive a grant under this program will use the funds to create and grow programs to train students who are attending graduate school to become school-based mental health services providers. The bill defines school-based mental health services providers as State-licensed or certified school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, or other mental health professionals qualified under State law to provide mental health services to children and adolescents.

Prior to applying for the grant program, a school district is required to form a partnership with one or more institutions of higher education that offer graduate programs in school-based mental health fields. This partnership would allow a student enrolled in a graduate program to perform applicable fieldwork, credit hours, internships, externships, or other related training within the school buildings of the partnering district.

I applaud and support the Legislature's efforts to address student mental health. Even prior to the Coronavirus disease 2019 ("COVID-19") pandemic, student mental health was a critically important issue. Research has shown that a student's mental health

and well-being are inextricably linked to success in the classroom. Moreover, we know that the mental health needs of students in New Jersey far exceed the number of licensed professionals able to provide the necessary supports. Mental health professionals in K-12 settings have been in notoriously short supply and the COVID-19 pandemic and the remote learning it necessitated have only exacerbated these shortages.

However, without a corresponding appropriation with which to fund this grant program, the bill will not achieve its intended goal. I am therefore recommending revisions to appropriate \$500,000 to the Department of Education to operate the grant program established by this bill.

Therefore, I herewith return Assembly Bill No. 4433 (Second Reprint) and recommend that it be amended as follows:

Page 4, Line 25:

Insert new section:

"3. (New section) There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Education a sum of \$500,000 for costs associated with the grant program established pursuant to section 1 of this act."

Page 4, Section 3, Line 26:

Delete "3." and insert "4."

Page 4, Section 4, Line 31:

Delete "4." and insert "5."

[seal]

Respectfully,

/s/ Philip D. Murphy

Governor

Attest:

/s/ Parimal Garg

Chief Counsel to the Governor