

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 555

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MARCH 9, 2021

The Senate Education Committee favorably reports Senate Bill No. 555.

This bill establishes the Task Force on Student Mental Health. Under the bill, the task force will consist of 16 members including: the Commissioner of Education; the Director of the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services; one public member appointed by the President of the Senate and one public member appointed by the Minority Leader of the Senate; one public member appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly and one public member appointed by the Minority Leader of the General Assembly; and 10 members appointed by the Governor, including: a school board member, a school principal, a school administrator, an elementary school teacher, a high school teacher, a school counselor, a school social worker, and a school psychologist, all of whom are currently employed in public schools in the State; and two parents of students enrolled in a public school.

The task force will study and make recommendations regarding the following:

- the identification of public school students who experience depression, anxiety, stress, or other psychological or emotional tension, trauma, or disorder;
- the evaluation and expansion of counseling programs and services available to students experiencing mental health difficulties, and other programs designed to address issues related to student mental health;
- the relationship of student mental health to school safety and security;
- the amount of funding that may be necessary for public schools to employ the appropriate staff and to establish new programs or expand existing programs necessary to address student mental health; and
- an examination of other states which have implemented programs that have successfully addressed depression, anxiety, stress, or other psychological or emotional tension, trauma, or disorder among public school students and reduced the number of students experiencing such difficulties.

The bill directs the task force to issue a final report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature no later than one year after its organizational meeting. The task force will expire 30 days after the submission of the final report.

This bill was pre-filed for introduction in the 2020-2021 session pending technical review. As reported, the bill includes the changes required by technical review, which has been performed.