

SENATE BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR **SENATE, Nos. 2718 and 555**

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 17, 2021

The Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee reports favorably a Senate Committee Substitute for Senate Bill Nos. 2718 and 555.

This committee substitute establishes the “Student Mental Health Task Force,” the purpose of which is to examine issues related to the mental health of students, including depression, anxiety, stress, or other psychological or emotional tension, trauma, or disorder; study and survey the resources that are available to schools and parents to address student mental health needs; and develop recommendations to ensure that students have access to mental health care programs and services in order to allow students to meet their educational goals.

The task force will consist of the following 17 members: the Commissioner of Education, or a designee, ex officio; the Commissioner of Health, or a designee, ex officio; the Commissioner of Children and Families, or a designee, ex officio; the Commissioner of Banking and Insurance, or a designee, ex officio; the Director of the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services in the Department of Human Services, or a designee, ex officio; one public member appointed by the Senate President, 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, all four of whom shall have demonstrated expertise in issues relating to the work of the task force; and the following eight public members appointed by the Governor: one representative of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, one representative of the New Jersey School Boards Association, one representative of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, one representative of the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, one representative of the New Jersey Association of Counties, one representative of the New Jersey League of Municipalities, one member representing school district leaders, and one school mental health professional who holds a valid educational services certificate issued by the State Board of Examiners that may include, but is not limited to, a school counselor, a school social worker, or a school psychologist.

The task force is responsible for examining issues related to the mental health of students, including depression, anxiety, stress, or other psychological or emotional tension, trauma, or disorder; study and survey all resources that are currently available to the schools and parents within each county in the State, and within the northern, central, and southern regions of the State, for helping a student or child who experiences mental health issues; and develop recommendations to ensure that students have access to mental health care programs and services in order to allow students to meet their educational goals.

The task force is required to survey the availability of certain mental health treatment services, mental health care provider networks that offer mental health treatment, government agencies that offer funding and mental health treatment services, and partnership opportunities with institutions of higher education to address mental health needs of students.

The task force is also required to study and make recommendations regarding the identification of public school students who experience mental health difficulties, the evaluation and expansion of counseling programs and services available to students experiencing mental health difficulties, 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, an examination of mental health programs successfully implemented by other states, and any other proposals the task force determines would provide for increased access to high-quality mental health programs.

The task force, in performing the above duties, is required to consult with parents of general education students, parents of students who receive special education and related services, and teaching staff members.

The task force will issue a final report to the Governor and Legislature no later than one year after the organization of the task force that contains the results of the above survey and recommendations. The task force is required to forward a copy of the report to every school district in the State. The task force will expire 30 days after issuing its final report.

As reported by the committee, this bill is identical to Assembly Bill No. 4436 (2R), which was amended and reported by the committee on this same date.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This bill is not certified as requiring a fiscal note.