



An Act Relative to the Promotion of Mental Health Education (H)

An Act Relative to Mental Health Education (S)

H. 482 (Representative Higgins) / S. 244 (Senator Collins)

What problem does this bill address?

Research finds that approximately one in five children and adolescents experiences the signs and symptoms of a diagnosable mental health disorder each year. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, nearly half of all youth will experience a mental health challenge before the age of 18. There are safe and effective treatments for children with emotional and behavioral disorders; however, only 20 percent of the children who need mental health and substance abuse services receive them.

Unrecognized, untreated and late-treated mental illness elevates the risk of mental health crises such as suicide and self-injury, diminishes prospects for recovery and contributes to substance use and other negative coping behaviors.

Research suggests that an increase in mental health literacy leads to early intervention and better health outcomes.

What difference will this bill make?

Consistent with current efforts to integrate physical and mental health care, this bill updates the physical education mandate to make mental health education a required subject in all Massachusetts public and private schools, in grades K-12.

Modeled on a new law passed in New York state, the bill takes a holistic view of mental health, ensuring that students “recognize multiple dimensions of health by including mental health, and the relationship of physical health and mental health, so as to enhance student understanding, attitudes and behaviors that promote health, well-being and human dignity.”

The bill would not mandate a specific curriculum or curriculum content. The CMHC urges the use of a cross-subject, evidence-informed approach that raises awareness and provides students with developmentally appropriate knowledge and tools.

Why is this bill needed NOW?

Addressing the behavioral health needs of students is one of the greatest challenges schools face. There is a growing body of evidence, including the experience in New York state, which suggests that mental health education increases students’ willingness to seek help sooner, and increases recognition of mental illness among caregivers and educators.