

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-451

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A WORKING GROUP TO STUDY THE EXPANSION
Title: OF MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES TO CHILDREN.

Vote Date: 3/23/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/21/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill establishes a working group to study expanding access to mental health services for children. The goal of the working group is to identify and remove barriers to mental health services for children. The Working Group will deliver a report on its findings and recommendations to the Children's and Public Health committees by January 1, 2023.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Kevin Kelly, State Senator, 21st District, Senate Minority Leader, CGA:

Senator Kelly believes no child should experience the barriers to care that Norvon Edwards did. His death has raised awareness of these barriers to care. Any parent who sees their child struggling with mental Health challenges should be able to access support, care, and treatment. A working group of healthcare professionals, child advocates, the Department of Public Health (DPH), other stakeholders, and experts should be able to develop a plan to expand access to mental health care while studying the role that racial, ethnic, and socio-economic bias plays in the accessing services.

Vanessa Dorantes, Commissioner, CT Department of Children and Families (DCF):

As the lead agency for children's behavioral health services, DCF is already working with legislative leadership on developing the legislation outlined in SB 2 that will include an oversight structure that would address the intent of this legislation. For that reason, DCF does not believe this legislation is necessary.

Sarah Healy Eagan, Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate (OCA):

OCA appreciates the focus of the bill which establishes a working group with intergovernmental membership and a clear and robust mission. OCA recommends reviewing the investment structure with an eye to payment reform, bolstering the existing array of services, and with a focus on children with developmental disabilities. OCA also would like to see a focus on workforce development, school-based mental health initiatives, and justice-involved at-risk children.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Thomas Burr, National Alliance on Mental Health Initiative, (NAMI CT):

NAMI CT supports this bill with the condition that the council be expanded to include parents with the lived experience of caring for a child with a mental health condition. This is consistent with the saying in the mental health advocacy community, “nothing about us without us”.

Antonia Edwards, SoliDarity

The children’s mental health crisis is now an emergency. Ms. Edwards speaks from her personal experience with the inequities in the system having seen how her grandchildren were mistreated by the system. This bill should be named after her grandchildren, Norvon and Norve who were victims of the systemic racial bias and cultural incompetency that plagues current mental health services, including those for children. Ms. Edwards requests expanding the panel to include a family care coordinator, Beacon Health, and someone from the Greater Hartford African American Alliance.

Howard Sovronsky, LCSW, Chief Behavioral Health Officer, Connecticut Children's (CCMC):

Prioritization of children’s mental health this session is laudable. The scourge of the pandemic has raised awareness of the existence and frequency of children’s mental health struggles. CCMC would like to see workforce development be a focus of the working group. Another focus should be the support of community-level providers as well as insurance parity and, finally, leadership and accountability.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

No testimony in opposition was provided.

Reported by: David Rackliffe, Asst Clerk

Date: March 31, 2022