

**Delaware House of Representatives**

**Rep. Valerie Longhurst**

**For Immediate Release:**

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**House Passes Longhurst Bill Implementing Mental Health Education in Delaware Schools**

*HB 301 would establish curriculum for grades K-12 in public and charter schools*

DOVER – The House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed legislation Tuesday that would institute mental health educational programs in elementary, middle and high schools throughout the state.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in five youth are affected by a mental health disorder, and untreated mental illness has been shown to lead to increased risk of dropout, homelessness, substance abuse, chronic illnesses, incarceration, and possibly suicide. However, students with access to mental health services in school-based health centers are 10 times more likely to seek care for mental health or substance abuse than youth without access.

Sponsored by **House Majority Leader Valerie Longhurst**, House Bill 301 would require the Department of Education to establish a statewide mental health educational curriculum for kindergarten through grade 12 in each school district and charter school, tailored to the developmental needs of students at each grade level.

“We know that unaddressed trauma leads to lifelong mental health challenges, substance use disorders, as well as higher rates of incarceration and negative health behaviors, including suicide. Untreated mental health issues impact a person’s physical health and create costly outcomes over the course of their lifetime,” said Rep. Longhurst, D-Bear.

“We need to break the stigma of mental health, and one of the most important ways we can do that is by educating young people about mental health so young people recognize warning signs and can get help. I know how important early intervention can be – we’re talking about improving the quality of life and even saving kids’ lives.”

A 2017 survey of Delaware high school students found that in the preceding year, more than one-quarter felt sad or hopeless every day for two weeks in a row, 16% seriously considered attempting suicide, and 7.2% attempted suicide.

HB 301 is part of a series of bills filed last month designed to collectively address mental health issues for Delaware children and adults through preventive measures such as annual wellness checks and more mental health practitioners in middle schools.

“While so many people experience their first mental health crisis as a child or teen, our society has long been slow to recognize those early experiences and is often ill-prepared to provide young people with the tools and support they need, which only serves to reinforce many of the stigmas that prevent young people and adults from seeking treatment,” said **Sen. Sarah McBride**, chair of the Senate Health Committee and Senate prime sponsor of HB 301.

“I want to commend Rep. Valerie Longhurst for recognizing that we all experience difficult moments in our lives and working to normalize conversations around mental health, starting at an early age. I believe strongly that the education programs created by this bill will help to save lives, and I look forward to passing HB 301 in the Senate.”

HB 301 heads to the Senate for consideration.

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