



SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

Chairman Bob Casey

Higher Education Mental Health Act

Why we need the Higher Education Mental Health Act

In recent years, there have been calls for increased access to mental health services coming from both sides of the political spectrum. Despite a significant need, the growing number of students at colleges and universities who have mental health concerns threatens to be lost among the larger debate.

Research has shown that more than 75 percent of mental health conditions begin before the age of 24¹, but colleges and universities are ill equipped to handle the mental health needs of students. From 2010 to 2015, the number of students using mental health counseling centers has increased by an average of 30 to 40 percent, while at the same time, overall enrollment in colleges and universities has increased by only 5 percent². Postsecondary education offers students a new level of independence, often accompanied by new levels of stress for which young people need supports. During this critical time, more than 50 percent of students between the ages of 18 and 24 reported having a severe psychological problem or experiencing feelings of hopelessness³.

To address the needs of students facing the stresses of college and to support postsecondary education institutions, we need to understand the types of mental health concerns youth are experiencing and the supports they need. A coordinated national effort bringing together advocates, experts, stakeholders and students will help ensure the mental health needs of students are addressed.

What will the Higher Education Mental Health Act do?

The Higher Education Mental Health Act establishes a national Commission to study the mental health concerns facing students at institutions of higher education. The Commission will be composed of stakeholders that represent disability and student advocacy groups, institutions of higher education, individuals and students with mental health disabilities and family members of students enrolled in an institution of higher education. The bill also requires the Commission to release a report at the end of its investigation that examines the services available to students with mental health disabilities and the current policies in place to assist students to remain in school and complete their degrees. The report will also provide detailed recommendations that institutions of higher education, states and the federal government can make to improve the mental health services available to students and properly address the rising number of students with mental health concerns.

Cosponsors: Kaine, Smith, Blumenthal, Klobuchar, Padilla

If you would like more information on the Higher Education Mental Health Act contact Christian Clesi (Christian_Clesi@aging.senate.gov) in Senator Casey's office.

¹ *Starting the Conversation: College and Your Mental Health*, National Alliance on Mental Illness and The JEDFoundation, (August 2016) (available at <https://nami.org/collegeguide/download>)

² *2017 Annual Report*, Penn State University Center for Collegiate Mental Health, (January 2018) (available at https://sites.psu.edu/ccmh/files/2018/02/2017_CCMH_Report-1r4m88x.pdf)

³ See *Campus Mental Health*, American Psychological Association (2018) (available at <http://www.apa.org/advocacy/higher-education/mental-health/index.aspx>)