

Governor Phil Murphy

Acting Governor Way Signs Legislation to Strengthen Mental Health Awareness and Support on New Jersey College Campuses

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New Law Builds on Governor Murphy's Ongoing Efforts to Address Youth Mental Health Crisis

UNION – As part of the Murphy Administration's commitment to addressing the national mental health crisis affecting New Jersey's youth, Acting Governor Tahesha Way today signed a bill at Kean University alongside state officials and legislative sponsors to strengthen mental health support on college campuses throughout the state. The legislation amends the existing "Madison Holleran Suicide Prevention Act" to require institutions of higher education to annually train employees, raise awareness among students, and improve access to resources that will help prevent suicides.

"The pressure and stress many students experience during college can exacerbate mental health challenges they may already be facing," said **Acting Governor Way**. "Equipping campus staff to recognize the signs of depression and suicidal ideation and understand how to help students in crisis will undoubtedly save lives. Our Administration will continue to work towards Governor Murphy's goal of addressing the mental health of young people throughout our state by providing the resources and supports they need."

Institutions of higher education are already required to have individuals with training and experience in mental health – who focus on reducing student suicides – available to students 24/7 either on campus or remotely.

Under the bill (A-1176), institutions of higher education will now also be required to ensure that individuals who have training and experience in mental health annually train their faculty and staff on how to recognize signs of depression among students as well as the warning signs and risk factors associated with student suicide. These experts will also make sure faculty and staff are trained on how to refer students to crisis hotlines and mental health screenings.

Given their role as peer leaders, Resident Assistants (RAs) must also receive annual training on understanding the signs and risk factors for depression and suicide, how to refer students to campus mental health resources, and how to respond to students in crisis.

To raise awareness throughout the college community, the bill requires institutions to conduct an annual mental health public awareness campaign aimed at reducing stigma, helping students understand depression and suicide, and letting them know the resources available to them. Additionally, the bill empowers institutions to share contact information with students for suicide prevention supports, such as the hotline number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, the 9-8-8 Hotline, and any other 24/7 mental health hotline deemed appropriate by the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OHSE). The 9-8-8 Hotline is available 24/7 for call, text, or chat for those experiencing a mental health-related or suicidal crisis, or those looking to help a loved one through a crisis.

Finally, the bill also requires each institution of higher education to establish a mental health crisis assessment and response plan to be used by campus staff, faculty, and RAs to identify, assess, and respond to a student who is experiencing a mental health crisis.

"We are incredibly proud of New Jersey's comprehensive commitment to student mental health under the Murphy Administration," said **Secretary of Higher Education Dr. Brian K. Bridges**. "Steps taken today, working in concert with other initiatives and investments by the State, will advance the efforts of New Jersey institutions to meet students where they are with the support and resources they need for success. Our collective goal must always be to ensure that a continuum of care, from immediate crisis intervention and counseling to everyday wellbeing support, is available, accessible, and responsive to the needs of postsecondary students from all backgrounds."

This bill builds upon other efforts to address student mental health, including a recent [partnership](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/3fvf8j/nrdit/7i4z95_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtBA!K6j8cZ5RUnuajs_kgJ7sP2B8mleE5KB4sxOeFOKGMRUhoI9PiMt1MkKMufcwcks) (https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/3fvf8j/nrdit/7i4z95_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtBA!K6j8cZ5RUnuajs_kgJ7sP2B8mleE5KB4sxOeFOKGMRUhoI9PiMt1MkKMufcwcks) announced by OSHE to provide 24/7, 365 days/year access to tele-mental health services on participating college campuses and a \$16 million investment of federal funds to help institutions of higher education develop community provider partnerships and build multicultural competency among faculty and staff. The Administration has also made significant investments in standing up the 9-8-8 hotline for all residents.

Sponsors of the legislation include Senator Joseph Cryan and Assemblywoman Mila Jasey, as well as Senator Nellie Pou and Assemblymen James Kennedy and Bill Moen.

"Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students - but these tragedies are preventable," said **Senator Joe Cryan**. "We have to be proactive by increasing awareness of the dangers of mental health conditions and by making sure that help is readily available. This law will build up mental health services, provide more training for campus personnel and allow students to get proper treatment when they need it. This is all about saving lives."

"College is a time of tremendous upheaval and change for students even under normal circumstances. In these particularly trying times, many continue to struggle with depression, and need help. Through this law, we can see to it that faculty and staff learn to better recognize the danger signs and lead students to the help they need before they consider taking their own lives," said **Senator Nellie Pou**.

"Far too many college students struggle with depression and other mental health issues in silence when we have a multitude of resources available to help them. We must do everything in our power to promote these resources to help save lives by letting students know they are not alone," said **Assemblywoman Mila Jasey, Assemblyman James Kennedy and Assemblyman Bill Moen**. "Suicide is preventable, and by expanding our existing suicide prevention efforts we can ensure that students, faculty and staff members are aware of the warning signs and ready to step in to help when it is needed."

"Access to mental health resources is critical for the well-being and success of students in higher education. By providing comprehensive support and resources, we can ensure that students have the tools they need to manage their mental health and thrive academically and personally. Here at Kean University, we prioritize mental health and work to create a culture of support and care for all students," said **T. Itunu Balogun, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the President, Kean University**.

"This bill recognizes that mental health services and education are essential for college students' health and well-being. Ensuring maximum awareness of the new 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and available mental health services will save lives and bring support to students who are struggling," said **Matt Camarda, Advocacy & Public Policy Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of New Jersey**.

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Office of Governor PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000