

LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA
ONE HUNDRED FIFTH LEGISLATURE
FIRST SESSION

LEGISLATIVE BILL 552

Introduced by Walz, 15; Bolz, 29; Hansen, 26.

Read first time January 18, 2017

Committee: Health and Human Services

- 1 A BILL FOR AN ACT relating to public health and welfare; to state intent;
- 2 to provide for a Children's Connection program; to provide duties
- 3 for the Division of Behavioral Health of the Department of Health
- 4 and Human Services and the behavioral health regions; and to state
- 5 intent relating to appropriations.
- 6 Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

1 Section 1. The Legislature finds that:

2 (1) Early intervention is essential to developing life-long well-
3 being for children facing mental health needs;

4 (2) Mental health challenges are frequently identified in the school
5 setting;

6 (3) The findings of the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study
7 conducted by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention make
8 it clear that childhood experiences have a tremendous impact on life-long
9 health and opportunity;

10 (4) Best practices are available for children and families to
11 promote health, stability, and well-being through treatment and therapy,
12 prevention, and early intervention. Such best practices can prevent entry
13 into the child welfare and juvenile justice systems as well as promote
14 mental health; and

15 (5) Creation of Children's Connection program initiatives in each of
16 the behavioral health regions established pursuant to section 71-807 will
17 provide the best practices described in subdivision (4) of this section.

18 Sec. 2. A Children's Connection program shall be created in each of
19 the behavioral health regions established pursuant to section 71-807.
20 Each program shall be a partnership between the behavioral health region
21 and Nebraska schools serving children in kindergarten through grade
22 eight.

23 The goals of the programs are to identify children with social and
24 emotional difficulties and to work with parents, schools, and health care
25 providers to provide timely, effective, and family-centered services in
26 order to prevent child welfare or juvenile justice system involvement.

27 Sec. 3. The Division of Behavioral Health of the Department of
28 Health and Human Services shall administer the Children's Connection
29 program. The division shall:

30 (1) Solicit annual program plans from each behavioral health region
31 and ensure that the plans meet initiative requirements;

1 (2) Identify evidence-based best practices in interventions for
2 children and provide evidence-based training to mental health
3 coordinators and community mental health providers on at least a biannual
4 basis; and

5 (3) Complete an annual evaluation of the program in each region
6 based on number of children referred and assessed, number of children
7 served, implementation of evidence-based practices, and improved health
8 and academic outcomes for children.

9 Sec. 4. Each behavioral health region shall develop a Children's
10 Connection program initiative with the following components:

11 (1) Formal agreements with specific referral sources, including, but
12 not limited to, public and private schools as well as the Nebraska Help
13 Line;

14 (2) Training for referral sources to recognize and refer children
15 who could benefit from the program;

16 (3) Formal agreements with community mental health providers to
17 serve children referred to the program with evidence-based strategies;

18 (4) Implementation of strategies to utilize available health
19 insurance or the medical assistance program;

20 (5) At least one mental health coordinator who shall meet with
21 families, assess needs, identify barriers to accessing services, and
22 assist with making connections to the health care provider;

23 (6) Funding specifically allocated for children who are assessed to
24 require treatment but do not have the means to pay for such treatment;

25 (7) Plans for collecting and submitting documentation of outcomes
26 and to participate in evaluation activities as required by the division;
27 and

28 (8) A budget including a local match of at least one-fourth of the
29 total cost of the initiative.

30 Sec. 5. It is the intent of the Legislature to appropriate two
31 million dollars each fiscal year to the Department of Health and Human

- 1 Services for distribution to each of the behavioral health regions to
- 2 establish a Children's Connection program.