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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE BILL

No. 1545 Session of  
2023

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INTRODUCED BY HOGAN AND MARSHALL, JUNE 29, 2023

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, JUNE 29, 2023

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AN ACT

1 Amending the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), entitled "An  
2 act relating to the public school system, including certain  
3 provisions applicable as well to private and parochial  
4 schools; amending, revising, consolidating and changing the  
5 laws relating thereto," providing for Digital Mental Health  
6 Services Pilot Program.

7 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
8 hereby enacts as follows:

9 Section 1. The act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known  
10 as the Public School Code of 1949, is amended by adding an  
11 article to read:

12 ARTICLE XV-N

13 DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES PILOT PROGRAM

14 Section 1501-N. Definitions.

15 The following words and phrases when used in this article  
16 shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the  
17 context clearly indicates otherwise:

18 "Department." The Department of Education of the  
19 Commonwealth.

20 "Digital platform." An electronic web-based tool that meets

1 the requirements in section 1503-N and provides for integrated,  
2 guided and self-guided assessment, support, prevention and  
3 treatment in mental health.

4 "Mental health services." The provision of assistance or  
5 preparation of a plan of assistance to students who are  
6 experiencing anxiety, stress, trauma or other mental or  
7 emotional impairments interfering with the student's education  
8 and behavior at school, with the goal of helping students engage  
9 in the school community in a productive and positive manner that  
10 maximizes social and emotional development and learning.

11 "Program." The Digital Mental Health Services Pilot Program  
12 established under section 1502-N(a).

13 "School entity." A school district, charter school, regional  
14 charter school, cyber charter school, intermediate unit or area  
15 career and technical school.

16 Section 1502-N. Digital Mental Health Services Pilot Program.

17 (a) Establishment.--The Digital Mental Health Services Pilot  
18 Program is established in the department for the purpose of  
19 developing and administering a pilot program to assist school  
20 entities with access to mental health services for students  
21 through an evidence-based digital platform.

22 (b) Program operation.--The program shall operate for three  
23 full school years, beginning with the school year that begins at  
24 least six months after the effective date of this section.

25 (c) Eligibility.--The department may select up to 50 school  
26 entities, geographically dispersed throughout this Commonwealth,  
27 to participate in the program.

28 (d) Application.--A school entity seeking to participate in  
29 the program shall complete an application to be established by  
30 the department. The department may accept up to 50 applications

1 per academic year. Applications accepted by the department shall  
2 be geographically dispersed across this Commonwealth. The  
3 department may not charge school entities a fee for  
4 participation in the program.

5 (e) Grants.--The department shall develop a procedure for  
6 awarding grants to school entities selected to participate in  
7 the program for the purpose of providing mental health services  
8 via a department-approved digital platform.

9 Section 1503-N. Approval of digital platforms.

10 The department shall develop a procedure for approving  
11 evidence-based digital mental health service platforms for use  
12 by school entities that meet the following minimum  
13 qualifications:

14 (1) The digital platforms shall provide a student online  
15 peer support community.

16 (2) A student shall have access to engaging, self-  
17 guided, evidence-based therapeutic tools, content and  
18 clinical activities.

19 (3) A student shall have the ability to interact with a  
20 mental health practitioner in real time and via scheduled  
21 therapy through text-based interactions.

22 (4) The digital platforms shall be made available to all  
23 students enrolled in a school entity and provide the ability  
24 to refer students to mental health services already provided  
25 by the school entity.

26 (5) The digital platforms shall have a proven risk  
27 management process that will escalate any student in crisis.

28 (6) The digital platforms shall have reporting that  
29 collates data and highlights trends in mental health across  
30 school entities.

1           (7) The digital platforms shall have a demonstrated  
2 ability to service multiple school entities in multiple  
3 counties.

4           (8) The digital platforms shall have proven peer-  
5 reviewed research and evidence-based clinical outcomes.

6           (9) The digital platforms shall have demonstrated  
7 experience with implementations to school-based populations.

8 Section 1504-N. Duties of school entities.

9           A school entity may provide access to digital mental health  
10 services on the premise of the school entity. A school entity  
11 providing access to digital mental health services shall do the  
12 following:

13           (1) Notify all parents or guardians of all students  
14 enrolled in the school entity that the school entity is  
15 providing access to mental health services via telemedicine.

16           (2) Maintain parent or guardian consent forms for the  
17 provision of the mental health services. Consent forms shall  
18 be required for each academic year in which a student  
19 receives the mental health services.

20 Section 1505-N. Funding.

21           The department may use the following funding to award grants  
22 and administer the program:

23           (1) Appropriations made by the General Assembly for the  
24 program.

25           (2) Funding appropriated to the department for general  
26 government operations.

27 Section 1506-N. Term.

28           The program shall expire three years from the effective date  
29 of this section.

30 Section 1507-N. Reporting.

1 (a) Report from school entity.--A school entity selected to  
2 participate in the program shall submit a report to the  
3 department no later than 60 days after the end of an academic  
4 year. The report shall include:

5 (1) The number of students who participated in the  
6 program.

7 (2) Any other information requested by the department.

8 (b) Report to General Assembly.--The department shall  
9 compile a Statewide report based on the information submitted  
10 under subsection (a) and submit a report no later than December  
11 31 of each year to the chairperson and minority chairperson of  
12 the Appropriations Committee of the Senate, the chairperson and  
13 minority chairperson of the Appropriations Committee of the  
14 House of Representatives, the chairperson and minority  
15 chairperson of the Education Committee of the Senate and the  
16 chairperson and minority chairperson of the Education Committee  
17 of the House of Representatives.

18 Section 2. This act shall take effect immediately.