

Date of Hearing: April 18, 2017

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jose Medina, Chair

AB 917 (Arambula) – As Amended March 21, 2017

[Note: This bill is doubled referred to the Assembly Health Committee and will be heard by that Committee as it relates to issues under its jurisdiction.]

SUBJECT: Student health: student suicide prevention policies.

SUMMARY: Requires the California Community Colleges (CCC) Board of Governors (BOG) and the California State University (CSU) Trustees, and encourages the University of California (UC) Regents, before the start of the 2018-19 school year, to adopt a policy on student suicide prevention. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Finds and declares, among others, that college students are experiencing increased rates of mental health issues and demand for treatment services. According to the 2012 National Survey of Counseling Center Directors, suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students, at a rate of seven deaths by suicide per 100,000 students. This results in nearly 200 public college student deaths annually in California alone.
- 2) Requires the CCC BOG, CSU Trustees, and encourages the UC Regents to, before the start of the 2018-19 school year, adopt, at a regularly scheduled meeting, a policy on student suicide prevention.
- 3) Specifies that the policy shall be developed in consultation with school and community stakeholders, school-employed mental health professionals, and suicide prevention experts and shall, at a minimum address procedures relating to suicide prevention, intervention and postvention.
- 4) Requires that the policy shall address the needs of high-risk groups, including, but not limited to, all of the following:
 - a) Students bereaved by suicide;
 - b) Students with disabilities, mental illness, or substance use disorders;
 - c) Students experiencing homelessness or in out-of-home settings;
 - d) Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning students;
 - e) Students with an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) score of 4 or higher; and,
 - f) Bullied students.
- 5) Requires that the policy must address any training to be provided to employees on suicide awareness and prevention.
- 6) Stipulates that materials approved by the BOG, Trustees, or the Regents for training shall include how to identify appropriate mental health services and suicide prevention programs,

both at the campus and within the larger community, and when and how to refer students to said services and programs.

- 7) Authorizes materials approved for training to also include programs that can be completed through self-review of suitable suicide prevention materials.
- 8) Requires the policy to be written to ensure that an employee acts only within the authorization and scope of the employee's employment terms or license, and that nothing be construed as authorizing or encouraging an employee to diagnose or treat mental illness unless the employee is specifically licensed and employed to diagnose or treat mental illness.
- 9) Requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to assist in developing policies for student suicide prevention, by developing and maintaining a model policy as a guide for the BOG, Trustees and Regents.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the Donahoe Higher Education Act, setting forth the mission of the UC, CSU, and CCC (Education Code Section 66010, et seq.).
- 2) Grants the UC Regents regulatory authority over the UC (EC Section 92440, et seq.).
- 3) Grants CSU Trustees regulatory authority over the CSU (EC Section 89030, et seq.).
- 4) Requires that the CCC shall be administered by the Board of Governors (EC Section 70901, et seq.).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS: *Background.* According to information provided by the author's office, suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students, claiming the lives of 1,100 students each other. It is found in California alone, there are approximately 200 deaths among college students.

Additionally, several states have enacted laws to establish suicide prevention policies in their college systems.

Need for the measure. The author contends that many college campuses offer various types and levels of mental health services, but that the, "high death toll shows that there is still a lack in this field due to the variations and inconsistencies in the suicide prevention efforts statewide."

The author argues that, "Creating a statewide model suicide prevention policy for institutes of higher education will create an effective, streamlined policy that can help us better serve college students across California in an equitable manner."

Policy considerations. As presently drafted, this measure tasks CDE to assist the BOG, Trustees, and Regents in developing policies for postsecondary students and to maintain a model policy. Committee staff notes that CDE has no authority over the postsecondary institutions of higher learning nor their regulatory bodies. Additionally, CDE's mission, in part, is to ensure quality learning for pupils in pre-K through grade 12.

Committee staff recommends, and the author has agreed to accept the following amendment:

Strike lines 7 – 12 on page four of the bill.

Additionally, Committee staff understands that the author's intent is to ensure the varying needs of students' demographics is taken into consideration.

Committee staff recommends, and the author has agreed to accept the following amendment:

Add Section 66265 (b) (7) Unique needs of student population.

To note, due to upcoming legislative deadlines, the Assembly Health Committee will process the amendments referenced above.

Committee staff also understands that many campuses within the various segments have procedures in place to help identify students who may be experiencing a mental health crisis and struggling with thoughts of committing suicide. To note, according to the CCC Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), it has developed training materials to assist in what appears to be captured in this bill. The CCCCCO utilizes a platform called KOGNITO, which provides online trainings on noticing signs of depression and other mental health issues.

Knowing that some community college districts have procedures in place and that the BOG would have limited enforcement methods should they create a policy; *moving forward, the author may wish to instead require each community college district to establish and implement a policy.*

Prior legislation. AB 2246 (O'Donnell), Chapter 642, Statutes of 2016, required local educational agencies that serve pupils in grades 7 to 12 to adopt policies on the prevention of student suicides and also required the CDE to develop and maintain a model suicide prevention policy.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter
The Steinberg Institute

Opposition

None on file

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