



**STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR**

CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU
Governor

January 11, 2022

Dear Members of the Education Committee,

I would like to express my support for Senate Bill 234, an act requiring student identification cards to include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This bill would require public schools that issue student identification cards to include the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline or their own mental health support helpline on those cards. This requirement would also apply to institutions of higher learning within the state.

Sadly, our nation's youth are not insulated from struggling with their mental health. Just last month, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory on the Youth Mental Health Crisis further exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ According to the advisory, mental health challenges were the leading cause of disability and poor life outcomes in young people before the pandemic, with up to 1 in 5 children ages 3 to 17 in the United States having a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorder. The pandemic's ongoing disruption to the lives of children and adolescents has only exacerbated those pre-existing challenges.

Last October, national health professionals and experts declared a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health citing increases in emergency department visits for mental health emergencies from prior to the pandemic.²

Since taking office, I have made mental health initiatives a priority and it has been an all-hands-on-deck effort over the last several years to make it a reality. Some recent successes include the January 1, 2022 launch of the state's rapid response system to ensure individuals in mental health crisis have timely and appropriate medical care. The Rapid Response program includes mobile crisis support and a 24/7 crisis call center for mental health, behavioral health, and SUD crises. As the pandemic exacerbated mental health challenges for our youth, we moved quickly to supplement mental health supports by funding a Jesse Lewis Choose Love mobile tour, which provided Social and Emotional Learning to youth throughout the State. The State spent millions to promote youth activities outside of the classroom, and to provide access to mental health supports through summer camps. Finally, this year the State is making an historic investment by acquiring Hampstead Hospital to provide acute mental health care for children and youth.

¹ <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/12/07/us-surgeon-general-issues-advisory-on-youth-mental-health-crisis-further-exposed-by-covid-19-pandemic.html>

² <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/child-and-adolescent-healthy-mental-development/aap-aacap-cha-declaration-of-a-national-emergency-in-child-and-adolescent-mental-health/>

In addition to these initiatives, there is always more that can be done. The small change in this bill helps ensure another easily accessible place for New Hampshire's youth to find information to access critical help. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides suicide prevention support as well as help for those in emotional distress.

To be clear, this bill will not require grades six through 12 public schools to issue student identification cards if a school district does not already do so. It would simply require them to include the helpline information if they choose to issue student identification cards.

To that end, I respectfully request the committee to consider my letter of support when deliberating the merits of this bill.

Sincerely,



Christopher T. Sununu
Governor