



Employment of Mental Health Professionals in School Districts
A.5019/Gonzalez-Rojas – S.1969/Jackson

BILL SUMMARY

The [Bill](#) requires mental health services be provided by each school district to all students who attend public schools and that each school district employ a school psychologist and school social worker. The term "[mental health professionals](#)" shall mean certified school psychologists and certified or licensed school social workers authorized to provide mental health support.

WHY SHOULD SOCIAL WORKERS SUPPORT IT?

The pandemic has drastically increased the need for mental health services for students in all age groups. In December 2021, Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy issued a [Surgeon General's](#)



[Advisory](#) to highlight the urgent need to address the mental health crisis of the nation's youth. "Mental health challenges in children, adolescents, and young adults are real and widespread. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, an alarming number of young people struggled with feelings of helplessness, depression, and thoughts of suicide – and the rates have increased over the past decade (General, 2021)." In the U.S., mental health

challenges are the leading cause of disability and poor life outcomes for young people. [Up to 1 in 5 children](#) ages 3 to 17 suffer from mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorders.

Monitoring indicators of children's mental health and expanding access to services are critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. For these reasons, the Mental Health Worker Bill, as it is commonly referred to, has many supporters. In a recent [Joint Budget Hearing](#) held by the NY legislature, NYS United Teachers Union President Andrew Pallotta [testified in support of the Bill](#), calling on the legislature to pass it. According to Pallotta, every school district should be required

to hire the number of mental health professionals it needs to address student needs. At [a recent meeting](#) held between Governor Kathy Hochul and the NY Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus, Assemblymember and Chair Michaelle Solages expressed her support for the Bill and called on NY Governor Hochul to include it in the [NYS Budget](#). The Bill also enjoys the full support of the NYS-NYC Chapters of NASW, as well as the NYS School Social Workers' Association.

HELPING TO IMPACT THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

The school-to-prison [pipeline](#) refers to school education policies that push students into the criminal legal system. Schools send students into the pipeline through disciplinary policies and a reliance on the criminal justice system to address issues more appropriately handled by mental health professionals. This can, and often does, result in unnecessary criminal charges and incarceration. The pipeline disproportionately impacts youth of color, youth with disabilities, and LGBTQIA students. The high incarceration rates of school-age students are a problem especially in low-income districts where resources are scarce. School social workers and psychologists are the first to see children in distress; such distress may manifest itself as behavioral/discipline problems in the school setting. According to a [report by the ACLU](#), schools with adequately staffed mental health workers have better attendance rates, less suspension and/or expulsion, and have better graduation rates. While there is a dearth of evidence to support the role of mental health workers, there is little to show a similar effect with law enforcement and the criminalization of students.

LEGISLATIVE CONCERNS

The Bill enjoys overwhelming support from the New York State Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, the New York State School Boards Association, The NYS United Teachers Union, the NYS Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, Asian Legislative Caucus, The NYS Council of School Superintendents, and a [host of Legislators](#). Concerns, however, center around the [difficulty school districts have](#) in finding candidates. School districts throughout NYS struggle with shortages of school mental health workers.

BILL HISTORY - First introduced in January of 2021, same Bill Sponsors

CURRENT STATUS – Referred to Education

Questions for Student Discussion & Legislative Questions

- What can the State and school districts do to increase the pool of mental health workers in NY?
- How do social workers impact the school-to-prison pipeline?
- As a Legislator, how are you part of passing this Bill?
- What inspired you to introduce this bill?
- What do you see as the strength of the Bill and what are its weaknesses?
- The Bill does not assign a funding source? How will the DOE and school districts fund it?

Websites

- [NASW National Association of Social Workers – School Social Work](#)
- [NYS School Social Workers’ Association – Legislative News](#)
- [NASW – NYS Chapter](#)

Visual Media

- [NYS Joint Legislative public hearing on 2022 Executive budget proposal, elementary & secondary education](#)
- [Virtual town hall Video, Schools need more social workers in the COVID-19 ERA](#)

Further Reading

- Dr. Claire Green-Forde, [Testimony, Public Hearing, NYC Education Budget & Revenue, PDF](#)
- [ACLU, \(2019\) Cops and No Counselors, PDF](#)
- NYS Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus, [\(2022\) The peoples budget, PDF](#).
- Politico, (2022), [Schools reopened, but students’ mental health is still suffering](#).
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Recommended Guest Speakers (Zoom)

- Claire Green-Forde, DSW, Executive Director, NASW-NYC
- Samantha Fletcher, PhD, Executive Director, NASW-NYS