



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

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American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
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RE: Support HB 1083 – COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES LEAD

Chairperson and Committee Members:

My name is Cassandra and I am the Area Director for the Minnesota Chapter of AFSP. I am writing today in support of HB 1083 476, which will establish a lead as a source of information and support for schools in addressing students' mental health needs and developing comprehensive school mental health systems. I encourage you to move this important piece of legislation forward in order for it to be signed into law.

While we won't know the large scale effects of the pandemic on mental health, we do know that in 2020, we lost 48 young people ages 15-19 to suicide in Minnesota, making it the 2nd leading cause of death for that age group. According to the latest Youth Risk Behavior Survey (CDC, 2019), in the year before the survey, almost 1 in 3 (29.4%) high school students reported feeling sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row; 16.2% seriously considered attempting suicide; 13.8% reported making a plan about how they would attempt suicide; and 8.2% attempted suicide one or more times. This suggests that we can and must do more to increase awareness of mental health programs and resources that are available for students who may be struggling.

The stigma around mental health often creates an environment that discourages showing signs of vulnerability, which can contribute to a reluctance to seek help or self-disclose mental health concerns or suicidal thoughts. Mental health is central to student success and well-being and we owe it to our students to ensure they are supported in seeking help and have resources they can turn to when they are struggling. We also owe it to our schools to provide support and assistance for prevention education and loss support after a suicide death and HB 1083 will do just that.

With your support, we can act to affirm the state's commitment to improving the lives of Minnesota's youth and prevent the tragic loss of life to suicide in the future. The AFSP Minnesota Chapter appreciates your consideration and we look forward to working with you and your staff on these issues moving forward. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Cassandra Linkenmeyer
AFSP Minnesota Area Director