



Senate
California Legislature

Dr. Richard Pan
Senator, Sixth District

SB 968 (Pan): Higher Education – Mental Health Counselors

PURPOSE

SB 968 will require the California State Universities (CSU) and the California Community Colleges (CCC) to hire one full time equivalent licensed mental health counselor per 1,000 students. The mental health counselors should reflect the diverse identities of the student population and be hired in accordance with additional needs identified on a campus. The University of California is encouraged to meet the same ratio.

SB 968 also requires that each campus report to the legislature at least every three years beginning in January 2020. The report shall include an evaluation of how the funding is spent and the number of mental health counselors per campus. Data shall be collected and included in the report on attempted suicides. A campus survey shall also be part of the report. The campus survey will include focus groups with students of color to understand the students' needs and challenges regarding, but not limited to, their mental health and emotional well-being, sense of belonging on campus, and academic success.

BACKGROUND

In 2000 the state established the CA Suicide Prevention Act which directed the Dept. of Health Care Services (DHCS) to create a program to reduce the severity, duration and incidence of suicidal behavior. Through Prop. 63, the CA voters supported the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) to

provide funds to counties to expand mental health services. Through MHSA funds, the Student Mental Health Initiative (SMHI) was created to allow for K-12 and higher education institutions to apply for program funds. These funds were not distributed to all higher education institutions. However, the CCCs did receive funding for their prevention and early intervention mental health strategies. The funding for that program ended in June 2017.

In the National College Health Assessment, the percentage of students nationwide reporting diagnosis or treatment for depression rose from 10.2% to 15.2% between 2008 and 2016. The percentage of students reporting feelings of overwhelming anxiety also rose from 49.1% to 60.8%.¹ Counseling center services are seeing an increase in student utilization. The 2017 Annual Report for the Center for Collegiate Mental Health shows that in 2015 students' use of counseling centers nationwide had increased over the preceding five years by an average of 30-40%.² There are many incidents that also go unreported. Students of color face additional challenges and

¹ American College Health Association, National College Health Assessment: Publications and Reports, http://www.acha-ncha.org/pubs_rpts.html. Accessed 2-8-2018.

² Pennsylvania State University Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2017 Annual Report, <http://ccmh.psu.edu/publications/>. Accessed 2-6-2018.

stressors that may affect their mental health disproportionately to other students.

To help address the mental health needs on campuses, the accreditation body for college counseling centers, the International Association of Counseling Services (IACS), recommends one Full time equivalent mental health counselor to every 1,000 – 1,500 students. Exceeding this ratio could lead to several issues including:

- a) Longer wait lists. Students in crisis tend to get the greater share of the limited resources, which takes resources away from students with less severe mental health conditions like anxiety. Longer waitlists also deter students from seeking counseling and could create greater liability for counseling centers and universities.
- b) The support for academic success of students is decreased. In a 2013 national survey by the Assn. of University and College Counseling Center Director Survey, 69% of students who filled out satisfaction surveys said that counseling helped their academic performance.

Since 2015, the UC System has made significant investments in their mental health program. The UC Office of the President Mental Health Program calculates that the counselor to student ratio within the UC System is 1:1,156 as of fall 2017. The CSU system has significantly higher ratios. Although these numbers have not been verified by the CSUs, The CA Research Bureau under the CA State Library calculates that across the CSU system, there is an average of at least 1,979 students for every counselor.³ The ratio for the CCC

³ We arrived at this figure by dividing fall 2017 total enrollment figures by our count of counseling staff listed on campus counseling center and health center

system could not be determined because the system does not systematically collect centralized data regarding campus health services.⁴

There is generally a lack of reporting and system wide data. The lack of information makes it difficult to accurately assess the mental health services being provided.

SUMMARY

SB 968 addresses the mental health crisis facing California's public higher education system and develops a more consistent system-wide reporting requirement. Campus counseling services are not meeting the growing student demand. We also do not have the proper data to evaluate the best campus counseling practices.

Student health includes mental health. SB 968 ensures our students have access to the services they need to take care of their mental health.

SUPPORT

California Faculty Association (Sponsor)
SEIU (Sponsor)

OPPOSITION

None on file

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websites. We followed IACS guidelines in determining which staff to include in our count, but we were unable to distinguish between FTE and part-time staff. We obtained enrollment figures for fall 2017 from the CSU Division of Institutional Research and Analyses, Statistical Reports, http://www.calstate.edu/AS/stat_reports/2017-2018/f_17toc.shtml.

⁴ Health Services Association – California Community Colleges (HSACCCC), Research Report 2016, <http://www.hsaccc.org/2016.conference.materials.html>. Accessed 2-7-2018.