

1 HOUSE BILL NO. 227

2 INTRODUCED BY M. DUNWELL

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4 A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE MONTANA STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH
5 SCREENING PILOT PROGRAM; PROVIDING A PROGRAM DESCRIPTION; PROVIDING RULEMAKING
6 AUTHORITY; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; AND PROVIDING EFFECTIVE DATES AND A
7 TERMINATION DATE."

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9 WHEREAS, Montana has an intolerably high youth suicide rate of more than twice the national
10 average; and

11 WHEREAS, too often, suicide warning signs are undetected by those close to a young person
12 contemplating suicide; and

13 WHEREAS, while the stigma surrounding mental illness has been reduced by the laudable efforts of
14 individuals and organizations in Montana, this stigma remains a barrier to improving the mental health of
15 Montanans; and

16 WHEREAS, the legislatively created Montana suicide review team included depression screening for
17 children ages 11 to 17 as one of its top recommendations in its 2016 final report; and

18 WHEREAS, in its final report addressing student well-being as part of the House Joint Resolution No.
19 56 study, the Education Interim Committee found that student mental health is a growing concern that will likely
20 be exacerbated due to COVID-19 and recommended that policymakers strengthen schools' ability to help meet
21 the mental health needs of students.

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23 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

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25 NEW SECTION. **Section 1. Montana student mental health screening pilot program.** (1) There is
26 a Montana student mental health screening pilot program. The program is established to encourage school
27 districts to offer optional mental health screening for students.

28 (2) The office of public instruction shall administer the program in consultation with the state suicide

1 prevention coordinator.

2 (3) The office of public instruction shall award grants to school districts to offer or contract for optional
3 mental health screenings for students and to ensure that students have the opportunity to receive services
4 following the screenings.

5 (4) In awarding grants, the office of public instruction shall prioritize grants to districts that:

6 (a) have a procedure in place that ensures all staff are prepared to address youth in crisis;

7 (b) plan to coordinate with community or regional partners to ensure that a student identified as
8 needing follow-up services receives the services regardless of the student's or the student's family's ability to
9 pay;

10 (c) plan to use a best practice screening tool for students who are 11 years of age or older as
11 determined by the office of public instruction;

12 (d) display community support for the program;

13 (e) include a detailed budget that minimizes administrative costs and costs per student screened; and

14 (f) include a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the screening program.

15 (5) The legislature intends that funds be distributed by the office of public instruction so that awarded
16 districts are able to offer mental health screening and services during the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school
17 years.

18 (6) The office of public instruction shall adopt rules as necessary to implement the Montana student
19 mental health screening pilot program.

20 (7) (a) Districts awarded grant funds shall report to the office of public instruction by April 15, 2022,
21 on implementation of the program.

22 (b) The office of public instruction shall compile the district reports and present its findings to the
23 education interim committee by July 1, 2022, so that the committee can consider possible recommendations for
24 the program to the 68th legislature.

25 (8) Districts awarded grant funds shall ensure compliance with all state and federal laws regarding
26 privacy of student records.

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28 **NEW SECTION. Section 2. Appropriation.** There is appropriated \$1 million from the general fund to

1 the office of public instruction for the biennium beginning July 1, 2021, for the purposes described in [section 1].
2 Any remaining funds that are unencumbered as of June 30, 2023, must revert to the general fund.

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4 **NEW SECTION. Section 3. Notification to tribal governments.** The secretary of state shall send a
5 copy of [this act] to each federally recognized tribal government in Montana.

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7 **NEW SECTION. Section 4. Codification instruction.** [Section 1] is intended to be codified as an
8 integral part of Title 20, chapter 5, part 4, and the provisions of Title 20, chapter 5, part 4, apply to [section 1].

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10 **COORDINATION SECTION. Section 5. Coordination instruction.** If both House Bill No. 2 and [this
11 act] are passed and approved and if House Bill No. 2 contains an appropriation for youth mental health
12 screening, then [section 2 of this act] is void.

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14 **NEW SECTION. Section 6. Effective dates.** (1) Except as provided in subsection (2), [this act] is
15 effective on passage and approval

16 (2) [Section 2] is effective July 1, 2021.

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18 **NEW SECTION. Section 7. Termination.** [This act] terminates June 30, 2023.

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