

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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\*\*Summary of the bill included

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**KENNEDY, DOMENICI, DODD FIGHT TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN SCHOOLS**

***ON NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH DAY, NEW LEGISLATION TO PROVIDE BETTER ACCESS FOR 53 MILLION CHILDREN***

Washington, DC— Today, on National Children's Mental Health Day, Senators Edward Kennedy, Pete Domenici, and Chris Dodd introduced bipartisan legislation to provide more and better opportunities for our nation's public school children to get the mental health services they may need. One in five children have a diagnosable mental disorder yet 75% of children in need of mental health services do not receive them. The Mental Health In Schools Act of 2007 gives competitive grants to local education agencies in order to assist them in providing comprehensive school-based mental health programs for students in K- 12.

"The need for these services has never been greater. The tragic events at Columbine, Nickel Mines, and Virginia Tech underscore the fact that when left untreated, childhood mental disorders can lead to academic failure, family conflicts, substance abuse, violence, and suicide." Senator Kennedy said. "Comprehensive school mental health program should be designed for all students. They should obviously include both identification and referral of specific individuals for treatment, but they should also include programs and services that promote positive mental health and prevent mental health problems for a broader population of students."

"We have seen over and over again that failing to offer effective mental health care has many ramifications, not the least of which is violence, substance abuse and poor academic performance," Senator Domenici said. "We must recognize that children do not have to remain neglected when it comes to their mental health. Investing in effective mental health treatment can mean the difference between a child's success and failure in school and in society. Our bill will give the federal government a more active role in providing this needed care."

"Mental health disorders continue to carry an unfortunate stigma, which often prevents people, particularly children and adolescents, from receiving the help they need," said Dodd. "We, as a society, bear an obligation to work to remove this stigma and help young people suffering from mental health disorders find treatment, like we would for those with physical ailments. A coordinated effort is needed to increase access to mental health resources, and the federal government is a significant part of that equation. By working to address this problem in our schools, I am hopeful that this legislation will provide the help needed to address these disorders and help our young people achieve their full potential."

Below is the Summary of the Bill:

## **Summary**

### **“Mental Health in Schools Act of 2007”**

#### **Purpose:**

\* The Mental Health in Schools Act of 2007 gives competitive grants to local education agencies in order to assist them in providing comprehensive school-based mental health programs for students (K-12) in communities across America. It provides increased opportunities for our nation's 95,000 public schools grades K-12 to provide better access to mental health services for the approximately 53 million school children in our country.

#### **Background:**

Strong mental health, similar to strong physical health, makes it possible for children to develop socially, emotionally, and intellectually. Mental illnesses often appear for the first time during childhood and adolescence, with one in five children have a diagnosable mental disorder. 75% of children and youth in need of mental health services do not receive them. With proper care and treatment, approximately 80% of people with mental illnesses experience a significant reduction of symptoms and a better quality of life. Schools are important settings for recognizing and addressing children's mental disorders because schools often function as the de facto mental health system for children and adolescents. Especially in rural areas, schools provide the only mental health services for children. Effective school mental health programs reflect the collaboration and commitment of families, students, educators, and other community partners. However, of the 95,000 public schools in the United States, only half of them report having formal partnerships with community mental health providers to deliver mental health services.

Services and supports provided through these partnerships need to be family- and community-centered and culturally and linguistically appropriate. This legislation aims to assist local communities in developing comprehensive school mental health programs that provide a continuum of services for students, within which schools play an integral part.

#### **How are we going to do this?:**

\* By broadening the scope of the Safe Schools-Healthy Students program, which currently focuses on helping children deal with violence to include services and supports to (1) students in need of immediate mental health supports, (2) students at-risk of behavioral mental health disorders, and (3) all students to promote positive mental health..

#### **What this legislation does?:**

\* Provides schools with the flexible use of funds to expand their current mental health programs.

\* Increases collaboration between schools, families, and their communities' resources through partnerships to provide and sustain more comprehensive mental health programs in schools.

\* Requires schools to apply a public health approach that incorporates positive behavioral interventions and supports to mental health programs in schools, which emphasizes promotion and prevention in addition to treatment.

\* Require schools to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate in-service training to all school personnel (including ancillary staff and volunteers) in the techniques and supports in:

1. early identification of children with, or at risk of, mental illness,
2. the use of effective referral mechanisms to ensure treatment intervention services for

such children, and

3. strategies that promote a school-wide positive environment.

- \* Require schools to demonstrate the measures they are taking to sustain the program once the grant funding is finished.
- \* Require the program to be culturally and linguistically appropriate in order to ensure that the program will meet the needs of its students.
- \* Require schools to base their program on evidenced-based practices.

**What should a comprehensive program address under this Act?:**

- \* Promote the social, emotional and behavioral health of all students.
- \* Reduce the likelihood of at-risk students developing social, emotional, or behavioral health problems;
- \* Treat or refer for treatment students with existing social, emotional, or behavioral health problems;
- \* Identify early on students with social, emotional, or behavioral health problems and provide early intervention services;
- \* Develop and implement programs to assist students in dealing with violence.

**How much will this legislation cost?:**

- \$200,000,000 for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012 to support 200 grants to local educational agencies nationwide.