**H. 3478 - Mental Health in Schools Act Executive Summary**

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Poor youth mental health is a growing public health problem across the United States and in South Carolina. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024), nearly 10% of school-aged children have attempted suicide, and 40% exhibit symptoms consistent with clinical depression. If not addressed, these mental health issues can hinder educational success and long-term well-being. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (2024) emphasizes that undiagnosed or inadequately treated mental illness interferes with a student’s life in myriad ways.

Despite the fact that mental health issues are more widely understood and accepted compared to previous generations, barriers remain the tackling them. These include limited understanding among educators and families, stigma around mental illness, and unjust funding for public schools. Because of these barriers, many students go without early detection or treatment, especially in underserved areas (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2025).

The Mental Health in Schools Act (H. 3478) aims to establish annual, evidence-based mental health screenings for students in grades 6 through 12 across South Carolina. The goal of the screenings is to enable early identification and intervention for mental and behavioral health challenges for students. The bill is sponsored by Representatives Kambrell Garvin and Gilda Cobb-Hunter. These two individuals bring relevant experience in law, teaching, and social work, as well as representing both urban and rural areas (Richland and Orangeburg counties). The bill promotes collaboration between the South Carolina Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Mental Health. It would also allow local education agencies to apply for grant funding to support mental health services and staff training.

The Mental Health in Schools Act aligns with the principles outlined in the National Association of Social Workers’ Code of Ethics (2025), especially service, social justice, and the dignity and worth of the person. The bill directly addresses systemic inequities, especially for students from underserved communities. However, it is still important to note ethical considerations regarding privacy and consent. Parents and guardians, specifically those in communities where mental health stigma is significant, may resist participation or lack understanding of the value of the screenings. Schools must ensure that all procedures comply with confidentiality standards and include opt-in or opt-out options as required by law. Additionally, it is necessary to ensure that programs are implemented fairly. If only well-funded districts can successfully implement the screenings and services, the policy risks exacerbating disparities.

As of July 2025, the bill has yet to progress to the floor for a vote. Its chances of passing are considered moderate. The bill’s programs could be eligible for federal reimbursement, but by ongoing Medicaid cuts and nation-wide austerity trends threatens this possibility. Advocacy efforts could be beneficial to the bill’s chance of passing. Public awareness campaigns could contribute to the engagement of parents, educators, and community leaders, who would further advocate for the bill’s passage. Concerted efforts to impart the bill’s importance to lawmaker’s could go a long way in helping it pass. Related organizations could also play a role in this effort. General mental health non-profits could mobilize along with individuals in the community to advocate for the bill.

In conclusion, the Mental Health in Schools Act represents a possible huge step forward in safeguarding the mental health of South Carolina youth. The bill has the potential to improve educational outcomes and long-term well-being for thousands of students. However, to overcome funding challenges, stigma, and political hurdles, strong advocacy and ethical implementation are critical.