

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on Health Care to which was referred House Bill No. 817
3 entitled “An act relating to mental health support and substance use disorder
4 prevention in schools” respectfully reports that it has considered the same and
5 recommends that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting
6 clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

7 Sec. 1. 18 V.S.A. § 7209 is added to read:

8 § 7209. MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY AND PEER SUPPORT

9 INITIATIVES

10 (a) Purpose. This section aims to strengthen protective factors among
11 Vermont’s youth, increase mental health literacy within school communities,
12 and expand access to developmentally appropriate peer-to-peer initiatives that
13 promote early identification of mental health challenges.

14 (b) Mental health literacy training.

15 (1) To the extent funds are available, a public school may apply to the
16 Department of Mental Health or designee for a grant to provide mental health
17 literacy training to educators and other school personnel. Mental health
18 literacy training shall include topics related to working with youth in an
19 educational setting, such as:

- 1 (A) information about mental health conditions and symptoms;
2 (B) understanding common youth mental health and substance use
3 challenges;
4 (C) reducing stigma and promoting supportive school environments;
5 (D) strengthening protective factors and help-seeking behaviors;
6 (E) recognizing risk factors and warning signs;
7 (F) responding to students with empathy and appropriate boundaries;
8 (G) information about mental health treatments; and
9 (H) accessing mental health resources or services throughout the
10 State.

11 (2) This section shall not be construed to require the adoption of a
12 specific curriculum or instructional content.

13 (c) Peer-to-peer mental health support.

14 (1) A school, afterschool program, or youth mentoring agency may
15 establish a peer-to-peer mental health program that:

16 (A) provides structured opportunities for student peer connection in a
17 supervised school or afterschool setting;

18 (B) is overseen by an adult, who is not required to be a licensed,
19 certified, or rostered mental health professional under title 26; and

20 (C) emphasizes school and community-based resources and how to
21 access professional services when additional support is needed.

1 (2) The Department of Mental Health shall provide oversight and
2 guidance to any school, afterschool program, or youth mentoring agency
3 seeking to establish or maintain a peer-to-peer mental health program pursuant
4 to this subsection, including qualifications of the adult overseeing the peer-to-
5 peer mental health support program.

6 (3) A peer-to-peer program established pursuant to this subsection shall
7 be supportive and nonclinical. It shall not replace mental health services
8 provided by a mental health professional licensed, certified, or rostered
9 pursuant to title 26.

10 (d)(1) Developmentally appropriate guidance. For any mental health
11 literacy or peer-to-peer support programs established pursuant to this section,
12 the Department of Mental Health shall develop age-appropriate guidance:

13 (A) for elementary school-aged youth, that emphasizes social and
14 emotional development, peer connection, and strengthening protective factors;
15 and

16 (B) for middle and high school-aged youth, that emphasizes
17 protective factors, reducing stigma, and supporting students in recognizing and
18 appropriately responding to risk factors and warning signs associated with
19 mental health and substance use challenges, including co-occurring challenges.

20 (2) As used in this subsection, “guidance” means defining and
21 disseminating best practices in a written format.

1 (e) Reporting. Annually, on or before January 15, the Department of
2 Mental Health shall submit a written report to the House Committee on Health
3 Care and to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare evaluating the
4 effectiveness of programming established pursuant to this section, including
5 aggregated information on:

6 (1) the number of schools, afterschool programs, and youth mentoring
7 agencies requesting and receiving the Department’s support;

8 (2) the number of students, educators, and school personnel participating
9 in programming pursuant to this section; and

10 (3) findings and recommendations regarding mental health literacy and
11 peer-to-peer programming.

12 Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

13 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

14 and that after passage the title of the bill be amended to read: “An act
15 relating to mental health literacy and peer-to-peer supports in schools”

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2 (Committee vote: _____)

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Representative _____

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FOR THE COMMITTEE