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The Scope of the Problem

Like youth across the country, Vermont youth are in the midst of a mental health crisis that our current system cannot meet alone. This is not just an individual concern—it's a systemic challenge requiring innovative, scalable solutions beyond traditional care.

In Vermont, **nearly 1 in 5 youth** (19.2%) reported experiencing anxiety or depression in 2021, and **30% of high school students felt persistently sad or hopeless**. According to the 2023 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, **34% of high school students reported poor mental health most of the time**, and **14% made a suicide plan in the past year**.

For LGBTQ+ and female students, rates of distress are even higher—54% and 47%, respectively.

Alarming, **nearly 1 in 5** (19%) students say they **don't know who to talk to about their challenges**.

Investing in universal mental health access for all Vermont youth is both a moral obligation and a necessary economic strategy. In an era increasingly driven by the “brain economy,” where brain health, and cognitive, emotional, and social skills like adaptability, empathy, and creativity fuel innovation and productivity, youth brain capital is an economic asset akin to the infrastructure of roads and bridges. Arguably, youth brain capital is *more* important: We need bright minds to solve problems. Brain capital is the foundation upon which future societal progress and prosperity are built. The World Economic Forum's 2025 Future of Jobs Report highlights that employers who invest in employee brain health and wellbeing can enhance performance and potentially boost global GDP by up to 12%.

Yet this vital asset - is under threat from social isolation, digital stress, an overstretched healthcare system unable to provide sufficient support, against a backdrop of anxiety-inducing societal instability. As technology and AI reshape the workplace, brain-based skills like creativity, resilience, and curiosity are becoming increasingly vital.

Programs like Soluna offer a scalable, evidence-based solution to protect and nurture youth brain capital by providing timely, accessible mental health support. By acting now, Vermont can

safeguard the wellbeing of its future workforce, strengthen community resilience, and lay the foundation for long-term economic growth and social prosperity.

The proposed legislation under consideration by this committee represents an opportunity for Vermont to take up the mantle of population-wide prevention approaches to building health communities and replicate the positive impact of Soluna observed in California here in Vermont. Vermont's system of care is stretched thin. Soluna offers a scalable, evidence-based digital mental health platform that meets young people where they are—filling critical gaps, offering safe and anonymous support, and alleviating pressure on overburdened providers. Funding a population-wide rollout of Soluna is a powerful and immediate step toward addressing this crisis.

Soluna: Expanding Access to Mental Health Support All Vermont Youth Aged 13-18

Note: Program data is from California implementation 01/01/2024 - 02/28/2025

What is Soluna?

Soluna is an evidence-based digital mental health platform designed to support the emotional wellbeing of young people through scalable, accessible, and culturally responsive care. Available via mobile app, tablet, and web, Soluna offers drop-in 1:1 coaching and scheduled 1:1 counseling with trained mental health professionals, guided self-help tools, moderated and vetted peer community forums, and personalized wellbeing plans. The platform includes robust safety protocols, including pre-moderated forums and risk escalation pathways. Soluna is built on gold-standard clinical frameworks and designed to integrate with existing systems of care, expanding access and relieving pressure on overstretched behavioral health services.

Thanks to a partnership with the Department of Healthcare services in California as part of Governor Newsom's Children Youth Behavioral Health Initiative, Soluna is available for free to all California Youth aged 13-25. This is a first-in-the-nation population-wide public health program to provide prevention services to all youth that will support youth mental health and wellbeing and build healthy and productive communities for years to come.

Science-Backed, Youth-Led

Soluna's model is grounded in evidence-based frameworks like Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), promoting self-determination and goal-setting. Coach performance is evaluated against Kooth's clinically-validated and proprietary fidelity model to ensure that coaches are using Integrative, Responsive, Evidence-Based, Safe, Person-Centered, Outcome-Focused, Non-Judgmental, and Data-Informed practice - reflected in the acronym "iRESPOND". Quarterly clinical audits against this fidelity model maintain high standards and improve care quality. Standardized quality control of behavioral health services in the United States is the exception, not the norm, and by implementing the iRESPOND mode Kooth has solved for the problem of inconsistent care between providers. Service users can trust that no matter which Soluna coach

they are matched with, they will receive high-quality science-backed and safe mental health support.

The California Project: An Example to Emulate

Soluna's Positive Impact on Young Lives

Soluna delivers clinically-validated, mental health support built on 23+ years of experience and 50+ academic peer-reviewed studies and white papers and supervised by Licensed Clinical Professionals. Soluna enhances—not replaces—existing services by providing accessible, science-backed early intervention support that reduces costly crisis care.

Service User Quote:

"My life has completely changed since I found this app... Having this free app has meant the world."

Expanding Access and Building Community Trust

Since its January 2024 launch, Soluna has:

- Reached **75,000+** youth across California
- Achieved **80% active users** among registered accounts.
- Delivered **19,668** coaching chats; **47%** occurred outside 9-5pm hours.
- Maintained a **less than 5-minute average wait time** for coaching chats; **99%** met the under 30-minute wait time goal.

Service User Quote:

"I finally feel like I am able to talk to someone... and it takes a huge weight off my shoulders."

Reaching Vulnerable Communities

In California, Soluna has successfully expanded access to underserved groups:

- **57%** of users come from underserved areas, including rural regions and underresourced neighborhoods as defined by the [Healthy Places Index](#).
- **50%** of users report Soluna as their first contact with the mental health system.
- **One-third of users** report that without Soluna they wouldn't have access to mental health support due to financial, geographical, or other logistical barriers.

Service User Quote:

"As a college student, this app being completely free sounded too good to be true... I am so thankful."

Youth-Centered Design

Soluna was co-designed with over 200 youth to ensure services meet real needs. In 2024, Soluna's User Research team conducted 290 studies to inform platform improvements to drive meaningful change in young people's lives.

- **87%** of youth report having at least one need met in a single coaching session.
- **99%** of coaching users reported positive feedback and feeling heard, understood, and respected.

Service User Quote:

“Thank you for making a mental health app that caters to our generation.”

Prioritizing Privacy and Safety

Soluna follows strict privacy standards, complying with applicable State and Federal data protection laws including Vermont's Consumer Protection Act, the Vermont Telehealth Law, COPPA, HIPAA, SAMHSA, and other applicable regulations that protect individual privacy.

- Licensed clinicians oversee all coaching interactions and provide counseling sessions.
- Peer forums are pre-moderated - no content is posted to the forums until it has been reviewed and approved by the clinical moderation team
- Services users are anonymous to each other, cannot privately message each other, and all user-generated content is pre-moderated before going live on the platform - there is no possibility of inappropriate content or inappropriate relationships between users.
- Peer forums are divided by age group to ensure developmentally relevant content: Youth under 18 only access content created by other users under 18.

Service User Quote:

“It’s nice to know there’s a place I can ask for help anonymously without judgement.”

Closing Thoughts: Investing in Vermont’s Youth and Future

Soluna is transforming youth mental health care in California through a population health approach that delivers free, accessible, and evidence-based support to underserved youth across the state. Vermont now has the opportunity to take up this mantle—leading the next wave of innovation in youth behavioral health. With high mental health needs and a largely rural population, Vermont is uniquely positioned to benefit from Soluna’s scalable model. By adopting Soluna, Vermont can ensure every young person has immediate access to vital mental health support and the tools to thrive within the communities they call home.

Learn more about Soluna

- [Learn more about Soluna’s Impact](#)
- [Our Service Users say Thank You to California](#)

Respectfully,

Dr. Laura Tully, Ph.D.

VP of Partnerships