

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 51

Requesting the Departments of, Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, and Social Services to study the feasibility of developing an early childhood mental health consultation program available to all early care and education programs serving children from birth to five years of age. Report.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 27, 2020
 Agreed to by the Senate, February 25, 2020

WHEREAS, the beginning years of any child's life are critical for building the foundation of learning, health, and wellness needed for success in school and later in life. During these years, children's brains are developing rapidly, influenced by the experiences they share with their families, teachers, and peers and in their communities; and

WHEREAS, exclusionary discipline practices are stressful, and negative experiences for young children and their families can influence adverse outcomes across development, health, and education; recent national data indicates that expulsions and suspensions occur regularly in early childhood settings and at a much higher rate than in K-12 education; and

WHEREAS, evidence shows that young children who are suspended or expelled in the early school years are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative attitudes toward school, and face incarceration than those who are not; and

WHEREAS, in 2014, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services jointly released a policy statement addressing expulsion and suspension in early learning settings, highlighting the importance of social-emotional health, and recommended that early childhood education programs have access to specialized supports such as Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation; and

WHEREAS, research shows that early childhood mental health consultation models can play an important role in improving school readiness and reducing preschool expulsions by addressing challenging behaviors, increasing positive social skills, and reducing teacher stress and burnout. Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) is a multilevel preventive intervention that teams mental health professionals with early care professionals who work with young children and their families to improve their social-emotional development; ECMHC builds the capacity of teachers, providers, and families and includes skilled observations, the strengthening of teacher-family relationships, teacher training, the identification of children with or at-risk for behavioral, developmental, or mental health difficulties, and linkages to additional support services; and

WHEREAS, in a 2018 report on challenging behavior in early childhood settings from the National Center for Children in Poverty, over 900 early childhood educators in Virginia were asked about their experiences working with children with challenging behaviors; a relevant finding is that 90 percent of teachers reported having at least one child in their care with challenging behaviors and 63 percent of teachers recommended increasing access to ECMHC services; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Department of Education, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, and the Department of Social Services be requested to jointly study the feasibility of developing an early childhood mental health consultation available to all early care and education programs serving children from birth to five years of age. In conducting the study, the Departments shall convene a work group to include stakeholders including the Virginia Early Childhood Mental Health Advisory Council, the Virginia Infant Mental Health Association, Voices for Virginia's Children, the National Center of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, the National Center for Children in Poverty, Zero to Three, Head Start, Early Impact Virginia, and other state and national experts as the Departments may deem appropriate. The work group shall evaluate the potential costs and benefits of adopting a statewide early childhood mental health consultation model to prevent suspensions and expulsions of young children attending early care and education programs in Virginia and shall (i) identify the appropriate state agency to scale up a statewide early childhood mental health consultation program, (ii) study effective models of early childhood mental health consultation, (iii) identify funding streams that Virginia could access to support statewide implementation of early childhood mental health consultation, (iv) develop a plan for scaling up the early childhood mental health workforce that builds off existing resources, and (v) provide recommendations for legislative, regulatory, budgetary, and other actions necessary to implement such a plan.

All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the Departments of Education, Behavioral Health and Developmental Services for this study, upon request.

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The Departments of Education, Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, and Social Services shall complete their meetings by November 30, 2020, and shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an executive summary and a report of their findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summary and report shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports no later than the first day of the 2021 Regular Session of the General Assembly and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.