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SENATOR SUSAN RUBIO
Press Release



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Senator Susan Rubio Introduces Bill to Expand Mental Health Education in Schools

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – **Senator Susan Rubio** (D-Baldwin Park) has introduced **Senate Bill 531 (SB 531)**, which will ensure all California students in grades 1-12 receive **age-appropriate mental health education** to equip them with critical knowledge and reduce stigma surrounding mental health.

“As a teacher, I’ve seen first-hand the many challenges that students and young adults face today,” **said Senator Rubio**. “Students are facing unprecedented mental health challenges, from social media and the aftereffects of COVID-19 to fears and trauma around wildfires, school threats, and changes in immigration policy. Mental health education is crucial for increasing awareness, tackling stigma, and encouraging health-seeking behavior. I’m proud to introduce **SB 531**, which ensures that students receive age-appropriate mental health education in schools.”

The Mental Health Crisis Among Youth

Nearly one-third of California adolescents have experienced serious psychological distress, yet only **53% of children ages 3-17** with a mental health condition receive treatment, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). **Suicide is now the second leading cause of death** among youth ages 10-24 in the United States, and more than one in ten high school students has attempted suicide in the past year.

Schools play a vital role in fostering safe environments where students can learn about and seek mental health care. According to the American Psychological Association, schools with comprehensive mental health programs see a **20% reduction in absenteeism**. A National Institute of Mental Health study also shows that early mental health education reduces stigma and **increases help-seeking behavior by 30%** among students.

SB 531 ensures that mental health education is integrated into existing health instruction for all students in grades 1-12, equipping students with tools to recognize distress, reduce stigma, and seek support before a crisis escalates.

Support for SB 531

“Mental health education is as essential as reading and math for our students’ success,” **said Jessica Wilson (Cruz), MPA/HS, CEO of NAMI California**. “NAMI California is proud to support **SB 531** to ensure all California students, at every grade level, are equipped with the tools to care for their mental well-being. We are committed to leading on this important issue and thank Senator Rubio for her leadership.”

“At The Children’s Partnership, we firmly believe in the necessity of expanding access to mental health education for all California students,” **said Angela M. Vázquez, Advocacy Director – Mental Health of The Children’s Partnership**. “Drawing on the youth wisdom from our Hope, Healing, and Health Collective, we understand that youth are smart consumers, innovative creators, and savvy disseminators of health information, and it is our state’s responsibility to ensure they have the age-appropriate information to make empowered decisions about their mental health and well-being.”

“The majority of mental illnesses occur during adolescence, a critical time during human development, which encompasses a period where youth are seeking education in grades kindergarten to 12th. Youth in K-12 spend over 25% of their day in school, second only to the 40% spent sleeping. Given that the school is a safe space to learn essential materials necessary for development, it is critical for their development that youth learn about their mental health, including ways to prevent, identify, and treat mental illness in an age-appropriate manner,” said **Ijeoma Ijeaku M.D., President of the California Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.**

“California’s youth are in the midst of a worsening behavioral health crisis, with devastating consequences for families and communities across the state. By expanding mental health education across all grade levels, this legislation will provide students with the tools they need to recognize, understand, and seek support for mental health challenges before they escalate into crises,” said **Adrienne Shilton, Vice President, Public Policy & Strategy of the California Alliance of Child and Family Services.** “We applaud Senator Rubio for championing this effort, which will empower students, reduce stigma, and ensure every young person has access to the knowledge and resources they need to thrive.”

“California’s young people face an unprecedented number of challenges to their mental health and well-being, from federal policies that threaten their access to needed and equitable healthcare to the lingering and long-term impacts of the recent devastating fires,” said **Shakti Belway, Executive Director of National Center for Youth Law.** “Through expanding access to mental health education to all grade levels, this legislation aims to equip our youth with the tools and knowledge they need to understand their mental health needs so they are empowered to seek needed support. We are grateful to Senator Rubio for leading this effort that recognizes the power of knowledge and young people.”

Senator Rubio has spent 20 years as a public school teacher at the Baldwin Park and Monrovia school districts before being elected to the California Senate. She has served as Chair of the Senate Select Committee on School Climate & Student Safety and has been a leading voice on education policy. In 2021, she authored [SB 488](#) to strengthen teacher preparation standards for reading instruction, in 2022, she authored [SB 1487](#) to establish the TEACH Survey to address teacher workforce shortages. Senator Rubio has led efforts with the Los Angeles Unified School District and the California Teachers Association to require mandatory kindergarten in California, ensuring children receive essential instruction in their earliest years of learning.

Senator Rubio is available for interviews in English or Spanish. To schedule an interview, please contact Brian Wheatley at brian.wheatley@sen.ca.gov.

For more information, visit the website of Senator Susan Rubio at <https://sd22.senate.ca.gov/>

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