STATE OF NEW YORK

5491

2025-2026 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

February 21, 2025

Introduced by Sen. ASHBY -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Mental Health

AN ACT to amend the mental hygiene law, in relation to establishing a mental wellness group pilot program

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. The mental hygiene law is amended by adding a new section 7.48 to read as follows:

§ 7.48 Mental wellness group pilot program.

1. (a) There is hereby created within the office the mental wellness group pilot program. The purpose of the pilot program is to partner with insurance companies to facilitate group therapy sessions for children ages ten through eighteen.

(b) The office shall be authorized and directed to promulgate all necessary rules and regulations required to implement the mental wellness group pilot program. Such pilot program shall gather together two or more children to form mental wellness groups. Such children shall be at least ten years old and no older than eighteen. Such children shall be active participants in the group and shall help to develop the goals they wish to reach. The mental wellness group shall help students identify problems, causes, alternatives and possible consequences so they can make decisions and take appropriate actions and help students overcome issues impeding achievement or success;

2. (a) The office shall contract with regional insurance companies to administer the pilot program under this section. The office shall award competitive grants of up to five hundred thousand dollars each year for a period of up to five years to each insurance company that demonstrates the ability to implement the pilot program under this section in their region, has an outreach plan, and has the ability to contract with counseling services. The office shall determine the qualifications and professions that are eligible to supply counseling services.

EXPLANATION--Matter in *italics* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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(b) Contracts with insurance companies under this subdivision shall be for a period of five years and shall be reevaluated by the office every twelve months to ensure such companies continue to provide a positive benefit to the community and conform to the program criteria.

(c) Contracted insurance companies under this subdivision shall work with regional school districts to implement mental wellness groups, as developed by the pilot program to coordinate their efforts with the local county mental health departments or programs or other lead mental health organizations in counties and cities within the region of the contracted insurance company and shall establish a referral system and linkages to existing area mental wellness programs and financing sources.

3. A contracted insurance company administering the pilot program shall provide technical assistance to implement the program which includes, but is not limited to:

(a) Access to affordable information services and counseling services, including information on the region and demographics of the children;

(b) Development of mental wellness connections, including interaction and exchange among local mental health groups, and resource providers, including, peer-to-peer learning sessions, and mentoring programs;

(c) Assistance in understanding state laws and regulations applicable to such insurance companies; and

(d) Any other form of consultation and technical assistance that may be provided to the eligible business to assist with its marketing needs.

4. The commissioner shall by regulation, establish the mandatory reports, the persons or entities with whom such reports shall be filed, and the treatment services that may be offered or directed by a mental wellness group.

5. The department shall review the progress of the pilot program at least once every twelve months and shall determine whether the contracted entity is meeting its contractual obligations for administering the pilot program. The department may terminate and rebid a contract if the contracted insurance company does not meet.

6. For the purposes of this section, the term "insurance company" shall mean a company doing an insurance business pursuant to section eleven hundred one of the insurance law.

§ 2. This act shall take effect on the thirtieth day after it shall have become a law.