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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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SENATE RESOLUTION

No. 168 Session of  
2019

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INTRODUCED BY BROOKS, LEACH, BLAKE, LANGERHOLC, J. WARD, ARGALL,  
COLLETT, YAW, TARTAGLIONE, AUMENT, COSTA, KILLION, BREWSTER,  
YUDICHAK, MENSCH AND MUTH, JUNE 14, 2019

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REFERRED TO HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, JUNE 14, 2019

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A RESOLUTION

1 Directing the Joint State Government Commission to establish an  
2 advisory committee to conduct a study on the mental health  
3 care provider shortage in this Commonwealth and to issue a  
4 report.

5 WHEREAS, The National Survey on Drug Use and Health for 2016-  
6 2017 estimates that approximately 17.68% of adults in  
7 Pennsylvania, or 1,786,000 individuals, have a mental illness;  
8 and

9 WHEREAS, The National Survey on Drug Use and Health for 2016-  
10 2017 also estimates that approximately 4.3% of adults in  
11 Pennsylvania, or 441,000 individuals, have a serious mental  
12 illness; and

13 WHEREAS, According to the National Alliance on Mental  
14 Illness, over 20% of youths between 13 and 18 years of age  
15 experience a severe mental disorder at some point during their  
16 life; and

17 WHEREAS, Mental health care providers, including  
18 psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers,

1 marriage and family therapists and licensed professional  
2 counselors, render crucial services to residents across this  
3 Commonwealth; and

4 WHEREAS, The National Council for Behavioral Health reported  
5 a shortage in the number of psychiatrists in 2012, estimating  
6 that the United States needs 6.4% more psychiatrists and, by  
7 2025, the United States will need between 12% and 25% more  
8 psychiatrists; and

9 WHEREAS, There are shortages of professionals to treat  
10 persons with serious mental illnesses, including those residing  
11 in the State hospitals in Pennsylvania and within the Department  
12 of Corrections, which is one of the largest providers of mental  
13 health services in this Commonwealth; and

14 WHEREAS, Adequate access to mental health care is essential  
15 to maintaining the overall health and well-being of  
16 Pennsylvanians; and

17 WHEREAS, Despite the growing demand for mental health  
18 treatment across the United States, a mental health care  
19 workforce crisis has been developing, largely due to a shortage  
20 of mental health care providers; and

21 WHEREAS, Pennsylvania ranks 35 out of all 50 states and  
22 Washington, DC, for mental health care workforce availability,  
23 with a patient to mental health care worker ratio of 600 to 1;  
24 and

25 WHEREAS, Pennsylvania has a Statewide average of 179 mental  
26 health care providers per 100,000 people, which is below the  
27 national average of 214 providers per 100,000; and

28 WHEREAS, According to Mental Health America, an estimated  
29 53.9% of the adult population with a mental illness in  
30 Pennsylvania did not receive treatment for their mental illness

1 in 2018; and

2 WHEREAS, Other factors contributing toward the mental health  
3 care workforce crisis include higher demand for mental health  
4 care providers, high turnover rates, an aging workforce and low  
5 compensation for workers in the field; and

6 WHEREAS, The shortage of mental health care providers also  
7 has direct and indirect costs on the economy, including a loss  
8 of efficiency and productivity for employees and employers; and

9 WHEREAS, Serious mental illness costs the nation more than  
10 \$193 billion in lost earnings per year; and

11 WHEREAS, Mental, substance-use and general health problems  
12 and illnesses are intertwined, and coordination of all these  
13 types of health care is essential to improved health outcomes;  
14 and

15 WHEREAS, The prevalence of mental illness in individuals can  
16 impact their overall health, as individuals with a serious  
17 mental illness face an increased risk of having chronic  
18 conditions; and

19 WHEREAS, Adults in the United States living with a serious  
20 mental illness die on average 25 years earlier than those  
21 without, largely due to treatable medical conditions; and

22 WHEREAS, Research has identified a definite connection  
23 between mental health and the use of addictive substances, as  
24 many patients with disruptive or uncomfortable mental health  
25 symptoms tend to self-medicate by using alcohol, drugs or  
26 tobacco; and

27 WHEREAS, The use of drugs and alcohol does not address the  
28 underlying mental health symptoms and often causes additional  
29 health and wellness problems for the patient, while also  
30 increasing the severity of the original mental health symptoms;

1 and

2 WHEREAS, The mental health care provider shortage is  
3 considerably more prevalent in rural counties and a significant  
4 discrepancy exists between access to mental health care in rural  
5 counties as compared to urban and suburban counties; and

6 WHEREAS, While the mental health care provider shortage is  
7 pervasive, it impacts certain populations to a larger extent;  
8 and

9 WHEREAS, One in four older adults experiences some mental  
10 disorder, including depression, anxiety disorders and dementia,  
11 and this number is expected to double to 15 million older adults  
12 by 2030; and

13 WHEREAS, Two-thirds of older adults with mental health  
14 problems do not receive the treatment they need and have limited  
15 access to current preventative services; and

16 WHEREAS, Adults who are at least 85 years of age have high  
17 suicide rates, especially older caucasian men, who have a  
18 suicide rate four times that of the general population; and

19 WHEREAS, According to the Centers for Disease Control and  
20 Prevention, suicide is the third leading cause of death for  
21 youths between 10 and 24 years of age; and

22 WHEREAS, It is believed that telemedicine, which involves the  
23 use of electronic communications and software services for  
24 patients without an in-person visit, will expand the mental  
25 health care workforce by offering flexibility to work from home  
26 and will enable collaboration between licensed mental health  
27 care providers and primary care providers; and

28 WHEREAS, Encouraging the growth and retention of the mental  
29 health care workforce in Pennsylvania will ensure that more  
30 individuals have access to timely and adequate mental health

1 screening and treatment; therefore be it

2 RESOLVED, That the Senate direct the Joint State Government  
3 Commission to establish an advisory committee to conduct a study  
4 on the mental health care provider shortage in this  
5 Commonwealth. The advisory committee should include, but need  
6 not be limited to, the following members:

7 (1) the Secretary of Education or a designee;

8 (2) the Secretary of Health or a designee;

9 (3) the Secretary of Human Services or a designee;

10 (4) the Secretary of Corrections or a designee;

11 (5) the Secretary of Drug and Alcohol Programs or a  
12 designee;

13 (6) a representative from the Pennsylvania Psychiatric  
14 Society;

15 (7) a representative from the Pennsylvania Psychological  
16 Association;

17 (8) a representative from the Pennsylvania Counseling  
18 Association;

19 (9) a representative from the Pennsylvania Chapter of  
20 the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy;

21 (10) a representative from the Association of School  
22 Psychologists of Pennsylvania;

23 (11) a representative from the Rehabilitation and  
24 Community Providers Association;

25 (12) a representative from the Pennsylvania Association  
26 of County Administrators of Mental Health and Developmental  
27 Services;

28 (13) a representative from the National Alliance on  
29 Mental Illness Keystone Pennsylvania;

30 (14) a representative from the Mental Health Association

1 in Pennsylvania;

2 (15) a representative from the Pennsylvania School  
3 Boards Association;

4 (16) a representative from the Pennsylvania State System  
5 of Higher Education;

6 (17) a representative from the Hospital and Healthsystem  
7 Association of Pennsylvania;

8 (18) a representative from the Pennsylvania Medical  
9 Society;

10 (19) a representative from the Pennsylvania Mental  
11 Health Consumers' Association; and

12 (20) any other individual or organization selected by  
13 the Joint State Government Commission;

14 and be it further

15 RESOLVED, That the advisory committee conduct a minimum of  
16 four public input hearings at geographically dispersed locations  
17 in this Commonwealth; and be it further

18 RESOLVED, That the advisory committee issue an advisory  
19 report to the Joint State Government Commission; and be it  
20 further

21 RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission review  
22 the advisory report and prepare a final report of its findings  
23 that shall include, at a minimum:

24 (1) identification of the factors behind the mental  
25 health care provider shortage in this Commonwealth;

26 (2) projections on the number of licensed mental health  
27 care providers in Pennsylvania in 5 and 10 years;

28 (3) how telemedicine can be used to extend the mental  
29 health care workforce and provide recommendations on how to  
30 overcome current barriers of use;

1           (4) recommendations on how Pennsylvania can encourage  
2 more individuals to enter and remain in both the public and  
3 private mental health care workforce;

4           (5) recommendations on how to solve the disparity in the  
5 number of licensed mental health care providers in rural  
6 counties compared to urban and suburban counties;

7           (6) recommendations on how to ensure there are  
8 sufficient numbers of licensed mental health care providers  
9 available in schools, including eliminating barriers to  
10 direct employment by schools and proposed staffing ratios of  
11 mental health care providers to student population;

12           (7) recommendations on how to train or attract mental  
13 health professionals to work in integrated care and other  
14 emerging areas; and

15           (8) recommendations on how to stop and reverse the  
16 mental health care shortage in Pennsylvania;

17 and be it further

18       RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission report  
19 its findings and recommendations to the Senate no later than one  
20 year after the adoption of this resolution.