

In Brief

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NEW ILLINOIS LEGISLATION TARGETS MENTAL HEALTH ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

No longer “just a bill,” the *Mental Health Early Action on Campus Act* became law on August 9, 2019. The legislation creates new rules and benchmarks for public colleges and universities that may require significant changes to policies, programming, and even staffing.

The Act’s substantive requirements go into effect on July 1, 2020. Colleges must be ready to implement several measures in the 2020-2021 academic year. The most immediate requirements include the following:

- Designate an expert panel to develop and implement policies and procedures aimed at statutory goals and IBHE standards regarding mental health on campus
- Require Mental Health First Aid or similar training, including the college’s policies and procedures, for resident assistants, advisors, and campus security before they begin their duties
- Use on-campus mental health services, agreements with local service providers, and/or contracts with telehealth therapy services to target a benchmark ratio of one clinical, non-student staff member for every 1,250 students
- Establish strategic partnerships with local mental health service providers to allow marketing and outreach opportunities on campus
- Distribute messages online during high-stress periods, including midterms or final exams, to encourage the use of mental health resources
- Develop and implement a peer support program based on best practices to support students living with mental health conditions on campus

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (“IBHE”), through its new Technical Assistance Center, will be responsible for issuing best practices and standards for college policies, peer support programs, partnerships with local service providers, and other

aspects of implementing the Act. The Technical Assistance Center will also update the benchmark clinician-to-student ratio for mental health services in August 2021 and every five years after that.

In addition to these requirements, the Act provides that colleges have until August 2022 to implement an online screening tool. This screening tool must function anonymously and include validated tools for screening several specific mental health conditions, a mechanism to refer students to services immediately, and general information about mental health resources. This tool and other mental health resources must be available all year.

Finally, the Act requires colleges to monitor and evaluate its mental health training programs, peer support programs, and partnerships with mental health service providers. The Act provides several specific measures that colleges must use to monitor each of these programs.

Keep an eye out for more publications as we keep up with new legislation. Contact your Robbins Schwartz attorney with your questions about this new law and the details of what it may mean for you.