

SB06-67 Bill Analysis

For the Health District of Northern Larimer County Board of Directors

February 15, 2006

Bill Title: Concerning Suicidal Behavior among Students in Higher Education

Summary: Requires a state institution of higher education to offer each new student the opportunity to sign a consent form allowing the state institution to notify a person designated by the student if a professional health care employee of the school has a reasonable belief that the student might be considering suicide or is a danger to him or herself.

Sponsors: Senator Hanna/ Representative Kerr

Committees: Education

History: 1/11/06 Introduced in Senate, Assigned to Education

Estimated Date of Next Action:

Date of Analysis: 2/8/06 **Prepared by:** Carrie Cortiglio **Priority:**

Background

Over the last few years, there have been several lawsuits by parents whose child committed suicide in college against the schools for failing to provide notification that their child was at risk of suicide. Most notably, in 2000 an MIT student named Elizabeth Shin committed suicide in her dorm room. She had been extensively involved with the mental health system at MIT and had attempted suicide previously. Her parents filed a lawsuit against MIT charging, among other things, that they should have been notified regarding her condition.

One ~~concern or~~ note about the bill is that the signing of the consent form is completely voluntary and permission to notify can be revoked by the student at any time. ~~Another is that the~~The bill doesn't address a larger problem of schools sharing or exchanging information on students who have been-treated by mental health providers or hospitals in the community, it just allows communication with parents.

Why is this issue important?

Suicide is an important mental health issue facing both Colorado and Larimer County. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth aged 15-24 in Colorado.¹ This bill would allow schools to communicate with parents regarding their child's mental health and give them information to help in the decision making process should the ~~if school~~ become aware that the child ~~become seriously~~ may be in danger of suicide.

Reasons to support bill:

- Most parents would likely want to be informed if their child were facing a mental health crisis so that they could be involved in decisions about treatment.
- Parental support may help with recovery.
- Parents may have information that could be vital to the student's treatment.
- The consent form is voluntary so it doesn't compel schools to release information or violate a student's right to privacy.
- The bill is an important first step toward the broader goal of effective information sharing.

Groups who supports:

Mental Health Association of Colorado

Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council's official position is to monitor the bill

Reasons to oppose bill:

- The bill states that the school can notify the person indicated in the consent form if a “professional health care employee” of the institution has a belief the student may harm him or herself. Professional health care employee is not defined in the bill so there is no clear delineation of who exactly could be authorized to determine that a student is suicidal.
- Given the voluntary nature of the consent form, it’s possible the legislation may not achieve its intended goal.
- Students who sign the consent form might be more likely to provide information to their parents anyway so the bill ~~is~~ might be unnecessary.

About this Analysis

This analysis was prepared by Health District of Northern Larimer County staff to assist the Health District Board of Directors in determining whether to take an official stand on various health-related issues. Analyses are based on bills or issues at the time of their consideration by the Board and are accurate to the best of staff knowledge. It is suggested that people check to see that a bill has not changed during the course of a legislative session by visiting the Colorado General Assembly web page at www.state.co.us/gov_dir/stateleg.html. To see whether the Health District Board of Directors took a position on this or other policy issues, please visit www.healthdistrict.org/policy.

About the Health District

The Health District is a special district of the northern two-thirds of Larimer County, Colorado, supported by local property tax dollars and governed by a publicly elected five-member board. The Health District provides medical, mental health, dental, preventive and health planning services to the communities it serves.

For more information about this analysis or the Health District, please contact Carrie Cortiglio

¹ Suicide Resource Center of Larimer County; www.suicideresourcecenter.org/about.htm