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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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SENATE RESOLUTION

No. 7

Session of  
2015

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INTRODUCED BY HUGHES, FONTANA, TEPLITZ, FARNESE, BREWSTER,  
TARTAGLIONE, LEACH, SMITH, YUDICHAK, COSTA AND VANCE,  
JANUARY 23, 2015

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REFERRED TO EDUCATION, JANUARY 23, 2015

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A RESOLUTION

1 Directing the Joint State Government Commission to study the  
2 issue of student suicide in higher education, to establish an  
3 advisory committee to conduct a thorough and comprehensive  
4 analysis of the underlying causes of student suicide and to  
5 report to the Senate with its findings and recommendations.

6 WHEREAS, This Commonwealth is home to some of the finest  
7 higher education institutions in the world; and

8 WHEREAS, Each year thousands of young men and women  
9 matriculate at these colleges and universities to pursue a  
10 higher education degree to prepare them for a future career; and

11 WHEREAS, Many of the young men and women who enroll in an  
12 institution of higher education will face numerous issues, both  
13 academic and nonacademic, associated with obtaining a college,  
14 graduate or professional degree; and

15 WHEREAS, Mental health issues often manifest themselves  
16 during an individual's late teens and early twenties; and

17 WHEREAS, Academic pressures coupled with the pressure of  
18 adapting to new surroundings, schedules, activities and  
19 responsibilities can lead to increased stress and anxiety among

1 students; and

2 WHEREAS, Increased stress among college students often leads  
3 to depression, substance abuse or other behaviors and conditions  
4 that may raise the risk of suicide, attempted suicide or  
5 suicidal thoughts among students; and

6 WHEREAS, The stigma associated with seeking or receiving  
7 mental health counseling or services often deters students from  
8 communicating their thoughts and feelings and seeking  
9 professional help; and

10 WHEREAS, According to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center,  
11 suicide is the second leading cause of death among college-age  
12 students accounting for approximately 1,100 deaths per year on  
13 college campuses; and

14 WHEREAS, According to the Pennsylvania Youth Suicide  
15 Prevention Initiative, suicide is the third leading cause of  
16 death for young people 15 to 24 years of age; and

17 WHEREAS, Available data suggest that suicide occurs at a rate  
18 between 6.5 and 7.5 per 100,000 college students; and

19 WHEREAS, In 2011, the American College Health Association-  
20 National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA), a nationwide  
21 assessment of college students at two-year and four-year  
22 institutions, found that approximately 30% of students reported  
23 being "so depressed that it was difficult to function" in the  
24 prior year. That same 2011 survey found that approximately 6% of  
25 college students reported seriously considering suicide and 1%  
26 reported attempting suicide in the prior year; and

27 WHEREAS, Student suicide unfortunately has touched a number  
28 of college and university campuses in this Commonwealth in the  
29 last few years; and

30 WHEREAS, The Senate recognizes the seriousness of the issue

1 of suicide among college, graduate and professional students in  
2 this Commonwealth and wishes to convene an advisory committee to  
3 study the issue; therefore be it

4 RESOLVED, That the Senate direct the Joint State Government  
5 Commission to establish an advisory committee of 25 members  
6 consisting of higher education officials, public officials and  
7 experts on the issue of student suicide in higher education. The  
8 committee is balanced so that it encompasses a wide range of  
9 backgrounds and viewpoints; and be it further

10 RESOLVED, That the advisory committee contain the following  
11 individuals:

12 (1) The President of The Pennsylvania State University  
13 or his designee. The designee may be an officer or faculty  
14 member of the university or an employee of the university,  
15 who provides services to students through a university  
16 counseling center, university health center or through  
17 university residency and housing programs.

18 (2) The President of the University of Pittsburgh or his  
19 designee. The designee may be an officer or faculty member of  
20 the university or an employee of the university, who provides  
21 services to students through a university counseling center,  
22 university health center or through university residency and  
23 housing programs.

24 (3) The President of Temple University or his designee.  
25 The designee may be an officer or faculty member of the  
26 university or an employee of the university, who provides  
27 services to students through a university counseling center,  
28 university health center or through university residency and  
29 housing programs.

30 (4) The President of Lincoln University or his designee.

1 The designee may be an officer or faculty member of the  
2 university or an employee of the university, who provides  
3 services to students through a university counseling center,  
4 university health center or through university residency and  
5 housing programs.

6 (5) The Chancellor of the State System of Higher  
7 Education or his designee. The designee may be an officer of  
8 the State System of Higher Education, a president, officer or  
9 faculty member of a university within the State System of  
10 Higher Education or an employee of a university within the  
11 State System of Higher Education, who provides services to  
12 students through a university counseling center, university  
13 health center or through university residency and housing  
14 programs.

15 (6) Two representatives, or their designees, of private  
16 institutions of higher education within this Commonwealth  
17 selected by the Joint State Government Commission upon the  
18 recommendation of the Association of Independent Colleges and  
19 Universities of Pennsylvania. Designees may be an officer or  
20 faculty member of the university or an employee of the  
21 university, who provides services to students through a  
22 university counseling center, university health center or  
23 through university residency and housing programs.

24 (7) An individual representing the community colleges of  
25 this Commonwealth selected by the Joint State Government  
26 Commission upon the recommendation of the Pennsylvania  
27 Commission for Community Colleges.

28 (8) Three students enrolled in good standing at  
29 institutions of higher education within this Commonwealth  
30 selected by the Joint State Government Commission. One

1 student shall be enrolled at a State-related institution, one  
2 shall be enrolled at a university within the State System of  
3 Higher Education and one student shall be enrolled in an  
4 independent college or university within this Commonwealth.

5 (9) The Secretary of Health, or his designee.

6 (10) The Secretary of Education, or her designee.

7 (11) An individual representing the Department of Public  
8 Welfare's Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse  
9 Services, selected by the Secretary of Public Welfare.

10 (12) Eleven members of the public who are experts on the  
11 issue of suicide, physical, behavioral or mental health, or  
12 who are involved in any other profession relevant to the  
13 issue of student suicide. Of the 11 members, nine shall be  
14 selected by the Joint State Government Commission, one shall  
15 be selected by the President pro tempore of the Senate and  
16 one shall be selected by the Minority Leader of the Senate;  
17 and be it further

18 RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission, working  
19 with the advisory committee, conduct a thorough and  
20 comprehensive analysis of student suicide in higher education,  
21 including graduate and professional schools, the issues set  
22 forth in this resolution and other related issues as determined  
23 by the commission; and be it further

24 RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission, working  
25 with the advisory committee, review the following to identify  
26 the best practices to address the issue of student suicide, its  
27 causes and effective suicide prevention strategies and to  
28 develop recommendations best suited for institutions of higher  
29 education in this Commonwealth:

30 (1) Proposals and policies of other states.

1           (2) Policies currently in place at institutions of  
2 higher education in this Commonwealth and other states.

3           (3) Other resources on the issue of student suicide;  
4 and be it further

5       RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission  
6 establish a process by which interested members of the public  
7 can make suggestions and have input; and be it further

8       RESOLVED, That the final report include recommendations to  
9 implement necessary changes in State statutes, practices,  
10 policies and procedures relating to student suicide, including  
11 measures to reduce the incidences of student suicide, and to  
12 develop awareness, education and other strategies to address  
13 issues relating to student suicide in higher education; and be  
14 it further

15       RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission issue a  
16 report to the Senate with its findings and recommendations not  
17 later than June 30, 2016.