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SENATE BILL NO. 259

Offered January 14, 2026

Prefiled January 12, 2026

A BILL to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Chapter 52 of Title 2.2 a section numbered 2.2-5215, relating to Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services; Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program established; pilot programs; development of modules; report.

Patron—Stanley

Referred to Committee on Education and Health

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Chapter 52 of Title 2.2 a section numbered 2.2-5215 as follows:

§ 2.2-5215. Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program; requirements.

A. As used in this section:

"Community services board" means the same as that term is defined in § 37.2-100.

"Department" means the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.

"Developmental readiness modules" means evidence-based curricula and training materials designed to build social, emotional, and behavioral competencies in children from three to five years of age in order to prepare such children for school entry.

"Early childhood mental health consultation services" means a problem-solving and capacity-building intervention service implemented within early childhood care and education programs through which a mental health professional is partnered with early childhood educators and families to improve the ability of staff, families, and early childhood care and education programs to prevent, identify, treat, and reduce the impact of mental health problems among children from birth to five years of age.

"Pilot region" means a geographic area of the Commonwealth designated by the Department for initial implementation of the Program.

"Program" means the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program established pursuant to this section.

B. With such funds as are appropriated for this purpose pursuant to the general appropriation act, the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program is hereby established, to be administered by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services in coordination with the Department of Education and the Department of Health, for the purposes of providing and expanding the accessibility of early childhood mental health consultation services in the Commonwealth. Pursuant to the Program, early childhood mental health consultation services shall be provided to:

1. Families of children three through five years of age who exhibit developmental delays or behavioral health concerns;

2. Licensed child day centers, family day homes, and preschool programs;

3. Head Start and Early Head Start programs;

4. Virginia Preschool Initiative programs; and

5. Prekindergarten programs at public schools.

C. The Department shall develop, or contract with community services boards to develop, and make available to community services boards, local departments of social services, school boards, Head Start programs, and licensed child care providers in the Commonwealth developmental readiness modules that include:

1. Evidence-based curricula for building social and emotional competencies in children three to five years of age;

2. Training materials for families on supporting child development and addressing behavioral concerns;

3. Professional developmental resources for early childhood educators on identifying developmental delays and implementing behavioral interventions;

4. Strategies based on applied behavior analysis principles for skill building and behavior management;

5. Screening tools and referral protocols for connecting children and families with appropriate services; and

6. Trauma-informed practices and resilience-building strategies for young children, families, and early childhood professionals, consistent with nationally recognized frameworks for trauma-responsive care.

D. The Department shall designate at least three pilot regions for initial implementation of the Program and the developmental readiness modules developed under this section. In selecting pilot regions, the Department shall give priority to regions with community services boards that demonstrate:

- 59 1. Existing capacity in early childhood services and evidence-based behavior interventions, including
60 applied behavior analysis;
- 61 2. Established relationships with school boards, Head Start programs, and licensed child care providers;
- 62 3. Ability to serve diverse populations in rural communities; and
- 63 4. Commitment to developing replicable models of statewide implementation of the Program.
- 64 E. The Department shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly and post in a publicly
65 accessible location on its website by November 1 of each year a report on the implementation and outcomes
66 of the Program for each pilot region designated pursuant to subsection D, including:
- 67 1. For each pilot region, (i) the number of children and families served, (ii) the types of services provided
68 and outcomes achieved, (iii) the impacts of participation on kindergarten readiness and early elementary
69 school performance, and (iv) the cost effectiveness of services; and
- 70 2. Recommendations for statewide implementation of the Program.
- 71 **2. That implementation of the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program by each pilot**
72 **region pursuant to § 2.2-5215 of the Code of Virginia, as created by this act, shall begin no later than**
73 **January 1, 2027.**
- 74 **3. That the provisions of subsections D and E of § 2.2-5215 of the Code of Virginia, as created by this**
75 **act, shall expire on July 1, 2029.**