

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SHB 1138

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As Reported by Senate Committee On:  
Higher Education, March 26, 2015

**Title:** An act relating to creating a task force on mental health and suicide prevention in higher education.

**Brief Description:** Creating a task force on mental health and suicide prevention in higher education.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Higher Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Orwall, Haler, Blake, Carlyle, Kochmar, Reykdal, Appleton, S. Hunt, Pollet, Tarleton, Ortiz-Self, Gregerson, Bergquist, Ormsby, Senn, Riccelli, Ryu, Tharinger, Walkinshaw and Fey).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 3/02/15, 91-6.

**Committee Activity:** Higher Education: 3/24/15, 3/26/15 [DP-WM].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Bailey, Chair; Kohl-Welles, Ranking Minority Member; Becker, Frockt, Liias and Miloscia.

**Staff:** Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

**Background:** According to the Washington State Department of Health (DOH), suicide is the second-leading cause of death in the state of Washington for youth ages 10 to 24 years, and the third-leading cause of death nationally.

According to the Spring 2014 National College Health Assessment Survey, sponsored by the American College Health Association, 8.1 percent of college students reported that they had seriously considered attempting suicide and 1.3 percent of students reported that they had attempted suicide within the last school year.

Forefront at the University of Washington (UW) is a collaboration of the UW School of Social Work, UW Communication, the UW School of Nursing, and the UW College of Education. Its mission is to advance innovative approaches to suicide prevention through policy change, professional training, campus and school-based interventions, media outreach, support for persons affected by suicide, and program evaluation.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

**Summary of Bill:** Forefront must convene the Task Force on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (task force) at public and private institutions of higher education to determine what policies, resources, and technical assistance may be needed to support the colleges and universities to improve access to mental health services and suicide prevention responses.

The task force must include one appointee from each of the following nine agencies or organizations: Washington Student Achievement Council, Council of Presidents, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Independent Colleges of Washington, Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, Northwest Career Colleges Federation, Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Social and Health Services, and DOH. Additionally, Forefront must invite as members specified experts, campus administrators, and students that represent the various demographics and geographies of the state.

The task force may form subgroups that research, discuss, and make recommendations on one or more topics that further the group's goals. Forefront must provide staff support and convene the initial meeting. Co-chairs must be chosen from membership and convene subsequent meetings. Expenses must be paid by UW, subject to funds appropriated specifically for the task force.

The task force, in cooperation with Washington's public and private institutions of higher education, must collect data related to mental health services, suicide prevention and responses, and deaths by suicide at the institutions to the extent that data is available. The data may include the following:

- protocols for responding to students in distress that cover intervention, treatment, and reentry;
- data on on-campus use of, funding for, and staffing of student behavioral health services over the past five years;
- information on the relationship between emotional distress and student withdrawal; and
- information on courses or seminars, student groups, screening efforts, and online resources pertaining to mental health issues and suicide prevention.

By November 1, 2016, the task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature. The report must include a summary of the data reviewed; best practices and policies for providing mental health services and preventing suicide; and recommended resources and technical assistance to increase awareness of behavioral health needs and support institutions to prevent suicide on campus.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Higher education is often the first break for mental illness. It also impacts our veterans on campus. We know prevention saves lives but

institutions are woefully unprepared to deal with suicides. UW is a leader in this issue and has been conducting a wide policy analysis. The process of reviewing resources makes institutions better at suicide prevention. Communicating how resources are available is difficult. If you look at national data, it is likely there could be 36 deaths of college students in the state. But we don't really know this because institutions are not collecting data consistently. Counselors and faculty need to be in synch when working with students in crisis. It is hard to take full advantage of the higher education experience if you are not mentally healthy. There is a profound impact to family left behind from suicide, although it is not always recognizable and can lead to major problems concentrating in and out of class. Institutions are inadequately prepared in the aftermath of suicide. Where prevention fails, the campus community should have consistent tools available so affected families and friends feel respected.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Representative Orwall; James Anderson, President, Associated Students of the UW Bothell; Ted Wicorek, Veterans Legislative Coalition; Donn Marshall, University of Puget Sound; Ellen Taylor, UW, Assistant Vice President and Director of the Counseling Center; Lori Ann Miller, Counselor-Tenured Faculty; Jennifer Stuber, Forefront, Faculty Director; Juliana Borges, Forefront: Innovations in Suicide Prevention, Huskies for Suicide Prevention and Awareness, UW student; Paul Bell, OSLA at Bellevue College; Marny Lombard, Patty McCullough, Eric Hausman, citizens.

**Persons Signed in to Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.