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## **DURBIN INTRODUCES BILL TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES**

### ***Competitive grant program would fund college counseling center outreach and student treatment***

[WASHINGTON, D.C.] – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin today introduced legislation to improve mental health services on college campuses. The *Mental Health on Campus Improvement Act* creates a competitive grant program that would provide funding to colleges to focus on both outreach to identify students with mental health needs and treatment of students coming to counseling centers for help.

“The shootings at Northern Illinois University and Virginia Tech focused national attention on college campuses and the challenges of identifying students who need mental health services,” said Durbin. “Colleges are encountering students who 10 to 20 years ago would not have been able to attend school because of mental illness, but who can do so today because of advances in treatment. Unfortunately today, there is very little federal help available for colleges to expand their mental health services and outreach programs. My legislation seeks to change that.”

The International Association of Counseling Services recommends counselor to student ratios of 1 to 1,000 – 1,500. The average ratio on campuses in the United States is growing, with an average of only one counselor for every 2,000 students. In fact, several Illinois colleges and universities report dramatically high ratios of full-time employees to students. At the same time, incidents of mental illness among students are reaching new heights with ten percent of college students having contemplated suicide and forty-five percent having felt so depressed they found it difficult to function.

Durbin’s legislation would ensure that colleges and universities have the resources and support they need to add personnel and aid students at a vulnerable time in their development by:

- Establishing a grant program within the Department of Education to assist colleges and universities in providing direct mental health services and outreach to students, families, and staff to increase awareness of mental health issues. The funds may also be used to hire staff and expand mental health training opportunities.
- Calling on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to create a public health awareness campaign around mental health and to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness for students. CDC would be required to seek input

from national mental and behavioral health organizations and colleges and universities.

- Providing federal leadership by establishing an interagency working group on college mental health to discuss mental and behavioral health concerns and promote federal agency collaboration to support innovations in mental health services and supports for students on college and university campuses.

The Mental Health on Campus Improvement Act has the support of the following national organizations: the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, the American Association of Community Colleges, the American Psychological Association, the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, Mental Health America, the American Council on Education, the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance and the American Counseling Association.