



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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Governor Janet Mills  
State of Maine  
1 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Governor Mills,

Firstly, I hope this letter finds you in good health. I was elated to hear that your COVID-19 test had come back negative. I hope all of those involved in that exposure case receive the same test results. During the swearing-in of the 130th Legislature, your video message spoke of your “open door policy,” so I hope this letter serves the same purpose.

Maine’s youth mental health is one of the things that keeps me up at night. As a father of an 8-year-old and a full time public school teacher, I have had a good view of how youth mental health has degraded since March of this year.

From sheltering at home and emergency remote learning this spring; to the canceling and curtailment of camps, festivals, and other outdoor activities this summer; to hybrid learning leaving many young students at home alone for more than 50% of their instructional time this fall, our impressionable Maine students have had to endure so much stress. Additionally, many sports seasons and extracurricular activities have been canceled altogether.

Many Maine families have suffered crushing blows to their financial and living situations, leaving many of our youth at risk with increased mental strain, domestic violence, financial and food insecurity, depression, and even suicidal ideation. Just the other day, a probable case of suicide has been reported at one of our high schools.

While many groups and organizations are doing their very best to make themselves available to students and make them aware of self-care, mental health, and crisis services, it is impossible to tell how severe and widespread this situation is - and which populations of students may be suffering the most.

**That's why I am asking you to direct the Department of Education (DOE) and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to implement the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) as soon as humanly possible.**

I am requesting that we conduct the MIYHS during both the current school year and the following school year. I believe it is a great use of CARES funds to make this available to our in-person and remote students and to fund the accelerated compilation and analysis of the data.

Since we have great data from previous years, the 2019 data serves as a perfect set of control data with which we could compare.

From my vantage point, it does not seem that the Legislature will be called back in before the end of the calendar year, so this is why I am asking you.

In full disclosure, on November 18th I submitted a bill for the 130th Legislature to be titled, "An Act to Track Youth Mental Health During COVID-19 by Ensuring the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey is Conducted During the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 School Years."

The reason for submitting this bill was when I reached out to the DOE about the survey being delayed, I was told, "The MIYHS steering committee had numerous discussions about postponing the 2021 MIYHS from Feb. until September. Survey protocol stipulates that MIYHS may **not** be taken remotely, just while students are in school. Unfortunately there are currently a significant percentage of students who would not be included in the data. Switching to the fall should result in a higher percentage of students back at school and able to participate. The importance of the data cannot be emphasized enough!"

While I understand the challenges around implementing this remotely, I am asking that you direct the steering committee to implement the survey for both in-person and remote students as soon as humanly possible. We must understand the status of youth mental health and after more thought, waiting an additional seven months until the survey will even commence is a wasted opportunity.

If it truly is impossible to conduct this survey for our youngest student populations, then we should move forward for the school grades where it is possible.

Since this is already a currently funded program with its own steering committee, I believe we do not need a bill in order to act more swiftly. I believe in the ingenuity of the DOE to execute the MIYHS as soon as possible to as many students as possible. I stand ready to work with you, the Departments, and the steering committee to begin planning its implementation before the holiday season.

As a member of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee in the 129th Legislature, I know the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey to be an important tool with solid data from previous years and I want to bring it to your attention.

Our students deserve our very best. Understanding our youth mental health is something we all desire.

Wishing you health and clarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Justin Fecteau', with a stylized, flowing script.

Rep. Justin Fecteau  
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