

STATE CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 942849
SACRAMENTO, CA 94249-0032
(916) 319-2032
FAX (916) 319-2132

Assembly California Legislature



RUDY SALAS, JR.
ASSEMBLYMEMBER, THIRTY-SECOND DISTRICT

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON RULES

August 13, 2019

Members

Joint Legislative Audit Committee
1020 N Street, Room 107
Sacramento, CA 95814

AUG 13 2019

Dear Members of the Committee:

I respectfully request your approval for an audit regarding suicide prevention for young people. The suicide rate among young people has increased significantly in recent years. Between 2016 and 2017—the most current year for which we have reliable data—the national suicide rate among boys aged 15-19 increased by 21 percent. The suicide rate among girls increased by 8 percent. More than half of these young people did not have a known mental health condition.

In my home County of Kern, which has one of the highest suicide rates in the State, young people's suicide rate is at an all-time high. Over the last decade, the suicide rate in Kern County has increased by over 30 percent. One recent tragic incident involved a 13-years young girl attending middle school who was bullied. Another tragic incident involved a young man—the son of a local firefighter—who would stand up for any kids being bullied. Suicide has impacted too many homes and families. To see the suicide rate increase and not do anything is unacceptable.

Schools can play an important role in addressing this increase in suicides. The United States Surgeon General and the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention recommend that teachers and school counselors, among others who are on the front lines of suicide prevention, be trained on suicide prevention. The United States Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the World Health Organization, and the California Department of Education similarly recommend that teachers and school staff receive suicide prevention training.

Legislation

The California Legislature is clearly concerned with the increased suicide rate and is attempting to address these tragedies through legislation. In 2016, the Governor signed AB 2246 (O'Donnell), requiring schools serving pupils in grades 7 to 12 to adopt a policy on pupil suicide prevention that specifically addresses the needs of high risk groups. Schools' policies must also address any training



provided to teachers on suicide awareness and prevention. This year, Assemblymember Ramos is attempting—with AB 1767—to expand these requirements to pupils in grades 1 to 6.

In 2018, Assemblymember Berman secured \$1.7 million to provide youth suicide prevention training for all school staff and students in the State. Other bills such as Assemblymember Muratsuchi's AB 272, which is aimed at reducing the use of smart phones by K-12 students, would address the issue through other means.

Request for Audit

I respectfully request that the Joint Legislative Audit Committee approve an audit to have the State Auditor examine efforts by LEAs and charter schools to address the issue of suicide by young people. I believe LEAs and charter schools can benefit from learning what they are each doing to develop and implement suicide prevention plans. I therefore request an audit with the following scope:

1. Provide and analyze statistical information related to adolescent and young adult suicide and self-inflicted injuries in California over the past 10 years. To the extent practical, provide information at a county level.
2. Identify and analyze Department of Public Health's role in suicide prevention.
3. Summarize experts' opinions regarding the causes and best ways to address increases in suicide rates and suicide clusters. Determine whether select LEA and charter school are consistent with best practices.
4. For a selection of LEAs and charter schools, perform the following related to their suicide prevention efforts:
 - a. Identify the extent to which each LEA and charter school tracks student suicides and attempted suicides.
 - b. Determine whether the LEAs and charter schools have a pupil suicide prevention policy and whether it is consistent with requirements in Education Code §215.
 - c. Assess each LEA's and charter school's pupil suicide prevention policy, and the method used by the LEA and charter school to develop it. Identify the extent to which the policy was developed in consultation with school and community stakeholders, school-employed mental health professionals, and suicide prevention experts.
 - d. Analyze any suicide prevention training provided by the LEA and charter school, and perform the following:
 - i. Identify who receives this training (e.g., teachers and administrators).

- ii. Identify how often and how the training is provided (e.g., self-review of suicide prevention materials, internally-developed group training program, or through training delivered by a third party).
 - iii. The extent to which training includes how to identify appropriate mental health services, within the school and community, and when and how to refer youth and their families to those services.
 - iv. Identify the content of the training, including any content related to LGBTQ and other students with elevated risks.
- e. Review each LEA's and charter school's preparedness for responding and assisting students after incidents of student suicide and attempted suicide.
- f. Identify and assess any effort by LEAs and charter schools to help students, including but not limited the provision of mental health services and access to hotlines, materials, and other resources.
- g. Identify any LEA's and charter school's best practices for assisting students and preventing suicides, including students in categories with high suicide rates.
5. Determine whether LEAs and charter schools can learn from one another regarding their efforts regarding suicide prevention, and whether they can benefit in some way by coordinating their efforts.

Thank you for your consideration of my audit request. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

Assemblymember, 32nd District

[Redacted Signature]

Marc Berman

Assemblymember, 24th District

[Redacted Signature]

Patrick O'Donnell

Assemblymember, 70th District

[Redacted Signature]

District