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### **Testimony for the Senate Education Committee on Senate Bill 1390 (Support)**

NAMI Texas is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization founded by volunteers in 1984. We are part of the nation's largest grassroots mental health organizations and we exist to help improve the quality of life for individuals with mental illness and their families. Around the state, we have 27 local NAMI affiliate organizations and approximately 2,000 members.

#### **Suicide is a serious problem for youth in Texas**

- ★ Suicide is the third leading cause of death amongst youth ages 10 to 24 and 4,600 young people die each year by suicide.<sup>1</sup>
- ★ 1 in 8 high school students in Texas reported a suicide attempt in the past year, almost twice the national average.<sup>2</sup>
- ★ 89% of Texas educators surveyed reported having personally responded to a youth suicide.<sup>3</sup>
- ★ The suicide rate in Texas increased by 19% between 1999 and 2016.<sup>4</sup>
- ★ Only 44% of districts reported using a best practice suicide prevention program in 2017.<sup>5</sup>
- ★ The Texas Education Agency does not have a system in place to ensure its more than 1,000 school districts are actually training teachers and other personnel in suicide prevention.<sup>6</sup>

Currently, only new teachers are only required to participate in a suicide prevention training in state law. School districts set their own schedule for future training as part of current statute, which means there is no set statewide standard on how often teachers receive suicide prevention training. Routine training is critical to be effective in responding to a student at risk of suicide, but there is no guarantee right now that teachers receive training often enough to retain the information. Learning how to intervene in a crisis is a journey, not a one-time event.

#### **Benefits of Teacher Training and District Planning**

A student suicide attempt or completion impacts not only the student, but the entire school community. Helping teachers identify students at risk by providing more routine training is critical in preventing trauma and saving lives.

Curriculum and training around suicide prevention can also impact other aspects of the school environment. Identifying risk factors and warning signs in student behavior as well as helping

students access mental health and crisis resources are useful skills not just for suicide prevention, but for improving school climate, addressing behavioral and academic issues, and overall making the classroom a friendlier place for everyone involved.

Being proactive on preventing and addressing suicide overall improves the work environment for school professionals. Working with students with serious mental health or related needs can be difficult without appropriate guidance and resources, and no educator wants to see their students fail, disrupt class, fall into harm's way, or die. This is traumatic and draining for everyone in the school environment. When students receive the help they need with mental health and well-being issues, they do better in class and better in life.

Suicide prevention training and district planning is not a luxury Texas can afford to ignore, it's as necessary as training and planning on emergency active shooter drills, natural disaster training, and fire drills, and student suicide and suicide attempts happen more frequently. NAMI Texas strongly urges passage of Senate Bill 1390 to empower schools with the tools they need to save lives.

### **References**

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3. Poland, Scott, and Poland, Donna (2016). Texas Suicide Safer Schools Implementation Guide and Tools. Texas Suicide Prevention Council.
4. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2018). Suicide rising across the US. Center for Disease Control.
5. Texas Education Agency. Texas School Health Survey, 2016-2017.
6. Collins, C. (2018, Jul. 31). Amid Record Youth Suicide Attempts, Texas Lags in Prevention Training for Teachers. Texas Observer.