

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Is it possible to prevent mental illness from developing in Massachusetts youth?**

The Special Legislative Commission on Behavioral Health Promotion and Upstream Prevention, chair by Marshfield Rep. Jim Cantwell, convened again Monday, the 25<sup>th</sup> with the goal of seeking an answer to this very question. For the optimistic members of the commission, as well as guest presenters, the answer is decidedly “yes.”

Cantwell said “The commission is set on creating a happier and healthier life for our local children and families affected by mental illness. With the combined efforts of the commission and our brilliant guest speakers we’re getting closer and closer to reaching that goal every day.”

Guest Speakers Jessica Larochelle and Genevieve Mulligan of the Mass. Association for Mental Health discussed beneficial preventative measures for both families and education professionals. Larochelle and Mulligan revealed that 50% of mental illnesses are diagnosed before age 14.<sup>1</sup> They stressed evidence-based practices in regards to prevention and early intervention as a solution, presenting two programs, MYCHILD and Signs of Suicide.

MYCHILD places mental health physicians in pediatrician’s offices, closing the gap between families affected by mental illness and the mental health experts that they might not have contacted otherwise. Signs of Suicide educates both students and teachers on the warning signs for depression and suicide, and has students assess themselves to determine whether or not they are at risk. Studies reveal that families who have used the MYCHILD system experienced a decrease in parental stress and unruly child behavior, while 64% of students who received SOS intervention were less likely to attempt suicide.

The Commission then learned from Dr. Shella Dennery, the director of Neighborhood Partnerships at Boston Children’s Hospital and Andria Amador, the assistant director of Boston Public Schools Behavioral Health Services. Recognizing the insights from extensive work in Boston Public Schools, Dennery and Amador stressed the importance of educators in students’ lives with their program, CBHM.

Though the state of Massachusetts often leads the pack in terms of mental health care, there are currently only 61 mental health providers for Boston’s 54,000 public school students. CBHM seeks to alleviate this issue by educating educators and offering both individual and group meetings with affected students. A sign of the power of supporting mental health in schools: students within the program have experienced an overall

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<sup>1</sup> The National Institute for Mental Health, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/any-disorder-among-children.shtml>

improvement in conduct issues, discipline and academic function since its implementation in over 90 Boston public schools.

The PromotePrevent Commission will convene again on October 12<sup>th</sup> to discuss how to prevent violence. You can learn more about the commission's initiative's at [promoteprevent.com](http://promoteprevent.com)