

Submitter: Susan Rogers
On Behalf Of: National MH Consumers Self-Help Clearinghouse
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure: HB2646

As Director of the National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse, I oppose HB 2646 for a number of reasons:

First, I understand that Mental Health First Aid would be the instrument used if this bill becomes law. For "The Problem with 'Mental Health First Aid,'" please see this statement by the Wildflower Alliance:

<https://wildfloweralliance.org/the-problem-with-mental-health-first-aid/>

Second, HB 2646 would "medicalize normal," as per critics of the fifth iteration of the "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual," which evaluates some normal human emotions as symptoms of mental health conditions. See the documentary "Medicating Normal" for more about this:

<https://medicatingnormal.com/>

Third, training "school employees on signs and symptoms of mental illness" seems to me to be a recipe for disaster. Even mental health professionals, who have chosen their careers, are highly fallible in the arts of diagnosis and treatment. School employees would predictably be more fallible--so...

...Fourth, it would likely result in the indiscriminate labeling of children and youth--labels on their "permanent records," with unpredictable but likely negative results. "Label jars, not people." And imagine how a young person would feel upon learning that they had been defined as having a mental health condition: set apart, alienated, "othered."

Fifth, there are so many better ways to support young people! For instance, schools should foster community by encouraging clubs, athletics, and other extracurricular activities. In fact, there are organizations for young people who might be interested in mental health issues. One such organization is Active Minds, which is on both college and high school campuses. Here's their blog about "5 Ways to Transform the Mental Health Conversation on Your Campus," which you might find helpful:

<https://www.activeminds.org/blog/5-ways-to-transform-the-mental-health-conversation-on-your-campus/>

Another such organization is Youth Move National:

<https://youthmovenational.org>

Both organizations have chapters around the U.S.

I hope you will consider these alternatives to HB 2646!

