

Statement of Proponecy for the Student's Mental Health Act (SB: OSU-005)

By: Alexis Horton (ORU)

Lobbyist for the Oklahoma Intercollegiate Legislature (O.I.L)

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Overview

Members of the Oklahoma Intercollegiate Legislature, I'm asking you to hear and seriously consider Senate Bill OSU-005, the "Students' Mental Health Act." As someone who works closely with students every single day, I can tell you this plainly: our students are not burned out because they're lazy; our students are burned out because they're exhausted, overstretched, and unsupported.

This bill addresses a challenge that affects everyone: the constant pressure to excel academically while silently battling internal struggles that often go unnoticed. As author Contreras emphasizes, this act doesn't excuse irresponsibility, yet it gives students the breathing room they need to stay healthy enough to learn.

Why Students Truly Need This Bill

Nearly every delegate in this chamber can name a friend, roommate, classmate, or even themselves who has hit a wall mentally during a semester. At this point, burnout is so normalized that students joke about failing mental health, when in reality, many are quietly drowning.

Oklahoma students are reporting higher levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional fatigue than ever before. Between juggling school, jobs, family responsibilities, athletics, and expectations, many students simply do not get a real break. Not every mental health struggle requires a doctor's note or a dramatic incident; sometimes it's the days when a student wakes up and simply does not have the mental strength to face the world.

This bill recognizes that reality. It gives students a humane, practical option: a short, teacher-approved mental health day to breathe, recalibrate, and return stronger. As someone who has watched students push themselves past their limits, I can tell you that one day can prevent a breakdown. One day can prevent a withdrawal. One day can change a student's entire semester.

Pros: Why This Bill Works

What makes this bill remarkable is that it is both compassionate and realistic.

It empowers teachers who know their students best to determine how many mental health days are appropriate, between two and five per semester. That's reasonable. That's manageable. And that's enough to make a meaningful impact.

1. It does not disrupt curriculum.
2. It does not require new state funding.
3. It does not create additional bureaucracy.

It simply allows students a moment to breathe without being punished for prioritizing their mental well-being. One delegate put it perfectly: "Students cannot learn when their minds are overwhelmed. This bill gives them space to be human."

I couldn't agree more.

Concerns: What Critics Might Say

Yes, there are concerns. Some might fear inconsistency between teachers or the potential for misuse. But the bill already addresses this: teachers maintain full discretion. They may grant

days as needed, they may assign short review work, and they may handle these days like any other academic decision made in their classroom.

Others may worry about students abusing the system, but let's be honest. Students who want to skip class are already doing it. The difference is that this bill protects the students who aren't trying to skip from those who genuinely need a day to protect their mental health.

And that is who this bill is for.

Conclusion

Delegates, this is not just another bill. This is a reflection of what our generation is living through. It is rare for legislation to be this simple, this affordable, and this impactful. The Student's Mental Health Act gives students something they desperately need: permission to take care of themselves.

1. You cannot expect students to succeed academically if they are suffering silently.
2. You cannot expect resilience without allowing rest.
3. You cannot demand excellence from students who have nothing left to give.

This bill must be heard.

This bill must be considered.

And for the sake of every student who has ever been overwhelmed, this bill deserves your vote.