

ASSEMBLY JOINT RESOLUTION

No. 183

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

221st LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED JUNE 6, 2024

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman ANTHONY S. VERRELLI

District 15 (Hunterdon and Mercer)

Assemblyman BENJIE E. WIMBERLY

District 35 (Bergen and Passaic)

SYNOPSIS

Designates month of May of each year as “Children’s Mental Health and Trauma Awareness Month.”

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 6/6/2024)

1 **A JOINT RESOLUTION** permanently designating May as “Children’s
2 Mental Health and Trauma Awareness Month” in New Jersey.
3
4 **WHEREAS**, Mental health is an essential part of a person’s overall
5 health and ability to thrive in their community; and
6 **WHEREAS**, Mental illnesses are medical conditions that disrupt a
7 person’s thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and
8 daily functioning; and
9 **WHEREAS**, Just as ailments of other organs of the body, mental
10 illnesses are medical conditions that often result in diminished
11 capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life; and
12 **WHEREAS**, Emotional disturbances can affect a child beyond their
13 immediate emotional state, sometimes creating long-term mental
14 health challenges that can affect physical, social, or cognitive skills;
15 and
16 **WHEREAS**, Some characteristics commonly seen in children who have
17 an emotional disturbance include hyperactivity, aggression, self-
18 injurious behavior, social withdrawal, immaturity, and learning
19 difficulties; and
20 **WHEREAS**, Children may be more vulnerable than adults to mental
21 illness, and children with mental illness have a far greater
22 likelihood of being suspended from school, abusing drugs or
23 alcohol, or ending up in the juvenile justice system; and
24 **WHEREAS**, Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic
25 experiences that occur during childhood; and
26 **WHEREAS**, These adverse experiences include physical, emotional, or
27 sexual abuse, physical and emotional neglect, household
28 dysfunction, substance use disorder, untreated mental illness or
29 incarceration of a household member, or domestic violence,
30 separation, or divorce involving a family member; and
31 **WHEREAS**, Strong, frequent, or prolonged stress caused by adverse
32 childhood experiences can become toxic stress, impacting the
33 development of a child’s fundamental brain architecture and stress
34 response systems; and
35 **WHEREAS**, Children who undergo multiple ACEs are at a higher risk
36 of suffering from depression, alcohol and substance use disorders,
37 suicidal tendencies, early death, and becoming victims or
38 perpetrators of sexual violence; and
39 **WHEREAS**, Adults who experience multiple ACEs during childhood
40 are also more likely to have a stroke, heart disease, and develop
41 cancer or diabetes, and to abuse or neglect their own children; and
42 **WHEREAS**, Many children with mental health disorders or who
43 experience ACEs do not receive treatment for their illnesses, due to
44 poor understanding of mental illness, toxic stress, stigma, and an
45 insufficient number of pediatric mental health professionals in the
46 United States and New Jersey which reduces access to available
47 treatment options; and

1 **WHEREAS**, Enhanced awareness of mental illness in children can
2 help to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness, and help
3 improve access to treatment that can help children lead full and
4 productive lives; and

5 **WHEREAS**, Educating the public on the impact of ACEs and toxic
6 stress on a child's body and brain can bolster the State's ability to
7 create trauma-responsive strategies to help mitigate the effects of
8 ACEs and make New Jersey a healthier State; and

9 **WHEREAS**, By annually honoring "Children's Mental Health and
10 Trauma Awareness Month," the State of New Jersey will
11 recognize that caring for every child's mental health and
12 mitigating the effects of adverse childhood experiences
13 reinforces the idea that positive mental health is essential to a
14 child's healthy development; now, therefore,

15

16 **BE IT RESOLVED** by the Senate and General Assembly of the State
17 of New Jersey:

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19 1. The month of May of each year is designated as "Children's
20 Mental Health and Trauma Awareness Month" in the State of New
21 Jersey in order to foster public awareness and understanding of
22 mental health, adverse childhood experiences, and mental illness in
23 children.

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25 2. The Governor is requested to annually issue a proclamation
26 calling upon public officials and the citizens of this State to observe
27 "Children's Mental Health and Trauma Awareness Month" with
28 appropriate activities and programs.

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30 3. This joint resolution shall take effect immediately.

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STATEMENT

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35 This joint resolution designates the month of May as "Children's
36 Mental Health and Trauma Awareness Month" in New Jersey to
37 raise public awareness of mental health, adverse childhood
38 experiences (ACES), and mental illness in children.

39 Mental illness can adversely affect children in many ways,
40 including increasing the likelihood of a child being suspended from
41 school, abusing drugs or alcohol, or ending up in the juvenile
42 justice system.

43 ACEs, which are traumatic experiences that occur during
44 childhood, can cause toxic stress, impacting the development of a
45 child's fundamental brain architecture and stress response systems,
46 and place children who undergo multiple ACEs at a higher risk of
47 suffering from depression, alcohol and substance use disorders,

1 suicidal tendencies, early death, and becoming victims or
2 perpetrators of sexual violence.

3 Many children with mental health disorders who undergo
4 multiple ACEs do not receive treatment for their illnesses due to
5 poor understanding of mental illness, toxic stress, stigma, and an
6 insufficient number of pediatric mental health professionals in the
7 United States and New Jersey which reduces of access to available
8 treatment options.

9 The resolution intends to promote awareness of pediatric mental
10 illness and ACEs, in hopes of improving the lives of children who
11 have emotional disturbances, other mental health disorders, or faced
12 trauma and adversity throughout their lives.