With new law, Iowa has new system devoted to children's mental health

Iowa legislators have created a first-of-its-kind system to better meet the mental health needs of children. As part of HF 690, signed into law in May, an appointed state board will be created to oversee this new comprehensive, coordinated system.

Members of the board will include a mix of state executive branch leaders (in health and education), experts in child welfare and mental health, local school leaders, pediatricians and law enforcement. Legislators will serve on the board as non-voting members. Iowa’s new law also spells out the types of “core services” that the system must deliver to children. That list of services includes: early intervention, medication management, outpatient therapy, access to a 24-hour crisis helpline, mobile response teams, and the availability of community-based and residential services to stabilize behavioral health crises in children.

Finding a sustainable, adequate supply of funding to provide these services remains the biggest legislative challenge ahead, mental-health advocates told the Sioux City Journal. Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds initially called for state spending of $3 million on this new children’s mental health system, but legislators ultimately included a $2.1 million appropriation.

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