

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2021

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S.B. 161
PRINCIPAL CLERK

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SENATE BILL DRS15068-MRa-64

Short Title: NC Statewide Telepsychiatry Program/Funds. (Public)

Sponsors: Senators Davis, Steinburg, and Corbin (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to:

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
2 AN ACT APPROPRIATING FUNDS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN
3 SERVICES TO EXPAND THE STATEWIDE TELEPSYCHIATRY PROGRAM
4 (NC-STEP).

5 Whereas, a recent national poll released by the American Psychiatric Association in
6 late March found that more than 36% of Americans say that coronavirus is having a serious
7 impact on their mental health; and

8 Whereas, as many as one in five people have a diagnosable and treatable psychiatric
9 disorder; and

10 Whereas, at a time when treatment for psychiatric illness has never been more
11 effective, many people with these disorders do not have access to psychiatric services due to the
12 shortage and maldistribution of providers, especially psychiatrists. In North Carolina, there are
13 31 counties without a psychiatrist, and 90 counties are designated as mental health shortage areas;
14 and

15 Whereas, the shortage of mental health providers has resulted in patients going to
16 hospital emergency departments to seek services, leading to long lengths of stay and boarding of
17 psychiatric patients in hospital emergency departments; and

18 Whereas, the use of digital technologies can bridge social distance, even while
19 physical distancing measures are in place. Telehealth services are perfectly suited to this
20 pandemic situation, giving people access to important services without increasing risk of
21 infection; and

22 Whereas, the Statewide Telepsychiatry Program (NC-STeP) has been a leader in the
23 area of telehealth; Now, therefore,
24 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

25 **SECTION 1.** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of
26 Health and Human Services, Division of Central Management and Support, Office of Rural
27 Health, the sum of one million dollars (\$1,000,000) in nonrecurring funds for each year of the
28 2021-2023 fiscal biennium to be allocated to East Carolina University Center for Telepsychiatry
29 and e-Behavioral Health for the statewide telepsychiatry program established under
30 G.S. 143B-139.4B, known as NC-STeP. These funds shall be used to establish five new
31 NC-STeP program sites.

32 **SECTION 2.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2021.

