

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 1985 (Irwin and Pacheco)
As Amended April 23, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires, on or before July 1, 2028, and every two years thereafter, each campus of the California State University (CSU), each community college of a community college district (CCD), and each private postsecondary educational institution and independent institution of higher education that receives state financial assistance, and requests each campus of the University of California (UC), require a person who serves as a coach in an athletic program to complete a student mental health training, as specified. States that the provisions of this bill may be cited as Sarah Shulze's Law.

COMMENTS

Mental health on college campuses. According to the 2024-25 Healthy Minds Survey, a nationwide survey on mental health and related issues in college student populations from the Healthy Minds Network, college students continue to report poor mental health, with more than one in three students saying they experience moderate anxiety or depression. Data from the most recent survey found that only 36% of college students are thriving, reporting high levels of success in relationships, self-esteem, purpose and optimism, down slightly from 38% the previous year. There is slight improvement since the COVID-19 pandemic, with fewer students reporting anxiety, self-harm and suicidal ideation than in 2021–22. Student usage of mental health resources also continues to climb; 37% of all respondents said they had accessed therapy or counseling in the past 12 months, compared to 30% in 2018–19.

According to "Suicide in National Collegiate Athletic Association athletes: a 20-year analysis," published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* (but focusing on athletes in the United States from 2002-2022), the rate of suicide in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) collegiate athletes has increased over the last 20 years and over the last decade has become the second most common cause of death, after accidents. The study concludes that additional mental health resources including efforts to raise awareness, screening for early risk identification, training coaches and support staff on how to identify athletes at risk, and providing access to mental health providers trained in sport psychology are examples of ways to help prevent suicide in this population.

NCAA pilot program. In August 2025 the NCAA announced a partnership with the National Council for Mental Wellbeing to offer fully funded Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) for Higher Education training to Division III institutions to focus on head coaches and athletic trainers. Division III schools are eligible to receive one fully funded training during the program, which will be in effect until August 1, 2027. According to the NCAA, the 2022 NCAA Coach Well-Being Study underscored the need for expanded mental health support in college athletics. NCAA says that more than 80% of coaches reported spending increased time addressing mental health concerns with their student-athletes compared with pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels, and many identified mental health as the top issue facing their teams. As of late July 2025, 66 Division III institutions had completed the MHFA training. Through this program, up to 30 individuals at each active Division III school are eligible to participate in a 7.5-hour, in-person

training with expert MHFA instructors on their campus. Upon completion, participants will be certified in MHFA for Higher Education for three years.

According to the Author

Athletic coaches play a crucial role in the lives of students as mentors and role models, often spending extended periods of time with students outside the traditional academic environment. Experiences on-and-off the field provide various opportunities for appropriate mental health interventions where coaches can provide mental health first-aid and hand-off care to parents and mental health professionals. However, requirements for mental health trainings for every coach at the collegiate-level do not currently exist in California. The author states this bill will require the Surgeon General to identify and compile a list of mental health trainings for colleges and universities to train athletic coaches. Additionally, every coach at a college or university in California will be required to complete a training approved by the Surgeon General. The author argues these trainings will ensure coaches are equipped with the tools to recognize signs of mental illness and behavioral distress in students participating in athletic programs. This bill is named in honor of Sarah Shulze, a Division I student-athlete from California that died by suicide while enrolled at the University of Wisconsin. The author states Sarah was an incredible multi-disciplined runner with a devoted spirit for change-making and compassion for others, and concludes that through her memory, her parents created the Sarah Shulze Foundation to advocate for the causes dearest to her: Mental Health, Student Athletics, and Women's Rights.

Arguments in Support

The California Hospital Association (CHA) states in support of this bill that hospitals see firsthand the growing number of young people in mental health crisis. Being able to spot the signs that a person is struggling and help them find support before their condition worsens is an important step toward improving this crisis. Athletic coaches have a unique perspective and ability to support their athletes' physical and mental health needs. CHA says that research shows that students who are struggling are often most comfortable reaching out to people with whom they already have relationships; as such, it is important to equip athletic coaches with tools to support their student-athletes' mental health.

The University of California (UC) supports this bill stating that the mental health of student-athletes is a recognized and ongoing priority across UC campuses, and we have invested in the programs, protocols, and training infrastructure necessary to support student-athlete well-being. UC states its campus athletics programs already require coaches and athletic staff to complete mental health training as part of their professional development obligations. Several campuses utilize nationally recognized training frameworks, including modules developed by the U.S. Council for Athletes' Health, that are consistent with both the intent of this legislation and NCAA Mental Health Best Practices guidelines. UC concludes they are committed to ensuring our campuses continue to meet or exceed the standards this legislation envisions, and look forward to supporting implementation of Sarah Shulze's Law.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) Ongoing Proposition 98 General Fund costs between approximately \$1.7 million and \$6.7 million for CCDs, collectively statewide, to implement and provide required training.
- 2) One-time General Fund costs of an unknown amount, possibly in the tens of thousands of dollars, for the CSU, UC, and the Office of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, collectively, to compile a list of appropriate mental health trainings.
- 3) The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

VOTES

ASM HEALTH: 16-0-0

YES: Bonta, Chen, Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Caloza, Carrillo, Mark González, Johnson, Patel, Patterson, Rogers, Sanchez, Schiavo, Sharp-Collins, Stefani

ASM HIGHER EDUCATION: 10-0-0

YES: Fong, DeMaio, Boerner, Macedo, Jackson, Muratsuchi, Patel, Ramos, Sharp-Collins, Tangipa

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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