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**Sen. Polsky and Rep. Cassel File Bill to Address Mental Health Professional Shortage**

**TALLAHASSEE, Fla.** – Today, State **Senator Tina Polsky (D-Boca Raton)** and State **Representative Hillary Cassel (D-Dania Beach)** respectively filed **[SB 1102](#)** and **[HB 1057](#)** to address the critical shortage of mental health professionals in Florida.

**Senator Polsky** said, “We must address this critical shortage of mental health professionals which is even more acute because of increasing need across our state. We are in a crisis and we need this quick action to attract more students to the field.”

“Rates of anxiety and depression are increasing, especially in our young adults and children. It is imperative that we have enough mental health professionals to meet the needs of Floridians,” adds **Representative Cassel**.

Florida ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> in mental health worker-to-patient ratio. Nearly 3 million adult Floridians are in need of mental health care. An estimated 191,000 youth experienced at least one major depressive episode in the past year.

This legislation will establish a mental health profession scholarship and loan forgiveness program within the Florida Department of Health. The purpose of these bills is to attract capable and promising students to mental health professions and encourage qualified personnel to seek employment in areas of this state suffering from critical shortages. Eligible students must be enrolled in a graduate-level program in psychology, clinical social work, marriage and family therapy, or mental health counseling.

Each recipient may be awarded a scholarship for up to two years, in an amount not to exceed \$8,000 per year. The department may award up to 5,000 scholarships each year, subject to availability of funds. For every year a recipient is awarded a scholarship, they must agree to work 12 months in either mental health services in an area where there is a shortage of mental health professionals or as a faculty member in their field of study.

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