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**Senator Tina Polsky and Representative Hillary Cassel Re-file
Mental Health Worker Shortage Bill**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. – This week, **Senator Tina Polsky (D-Boca Raton)** and **Representative Hillary Cassel (D-Dania Beach)** filed **[SB 164](#)** and **[HB 147](#)**, addressing the shortage of mental health workers in the state.

“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.” said **Senator Tina Polsky**.

Representative Hillary Cassel added, “As someone who works every day to prioritize and improve my own mental health, I know firsthand how imperative it is for our state to address its shortage of mental health professionals. When I participated in a roundtable discussion on mental health alongside numerous medical professionals just a few months ago, every single one of them agreed that a bill like this was and is necessary. By increasing the number of qualified professionals working in this field, Florida will better position itself to provide critical support to countless residents - and even save lives.”

Florida ranks 43rd 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 the

area where there is a shortage of mental health professionals or as a faculty member in their field of study.

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