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ILLINOIS SAFE2HELP PROGRAM SUPPORTS STUDENTS ACROSS THE STATE

SPRINGFIELD – On the one-year anniversary of its creation, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) Safe2Help program reports that it has received 873 public interactions across the state. Safe2Help Illinois is a free, information sharing platform that is available 24/7. In the absence of a trusted adult, students can use a free app, text/phone, or the website (Safe2HelpIL.com) to share school safety issues in a confidential environment. It was launched on October 20, 2021.

“The Safe2Help program is designed to help school-age children who experience bullying, mental health struggles, or those who see signs of potential drug use or violence in someone else,” said **IEMA Director Alicia Tate-Nadeau**. “The numbers prove that this program is indeed necessary.”

There are several ways that students from kindergarten through high school can reach out to Safe2Help:

- Call 1-844-4SAFEIL (723345)
- Text SAFE2 (72332)
- Online at <https://app.safe22helpil.com/>
- Email HELP@Safe2HelpIL.com
- Download the Safe2HelpIL app

“Our schools must be places where our young people feel safe and connected,” said **State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala**. “Safe2Help is a welcome safety tool that can help us prevent tragedies like the mass shootings in Highland Park and Uvalde, protect students from bullying, and connect struggling students with mental health support. I encourage all of our school leaders to continue raising awareness about Safe2Help among students, so each and every student knows they have a confidential way to share information with trusted adults.”

“Timely information is critical to intervene and prevent a dangerous or harmful situation,” said **Illinois State Police Director Brendan F. Kelly**. “The Safe2Help program offers students a safe way to share information about what they observe, which can help protect their fellow students and teachers.”

“It is our mission to ensure that Illinois’ children grow up in safe and healthy environments. The Safe2Help program is a safe, user-friendly tool children can use to ask for help if they or someone they know is in danger and they don’t have a trusted adult they can turn to,” said **Illinois Department of Children & Family Services’ Director Marc D. Smith**. “We are happy to partner with IEMA on this important initiative to let children know that they are never alone, and help is just a phone call, text or click away.”

“We are pleased to partner with IEMA on their work to improve safety for children and high school students. The IDHS Division of Mental Health will continue to bring expertise to this effort, and to share this important resource with students and families across the state,” said **Grace B. Hou, Secretary, Illinois Department of Human Services**.

IEMA School Safety Policy Advisor Samantha Kanish, who coordinates Safe2Help in Illinois, said, “Safe2Help Illinois is an important resource for students as it empowers them to seek help for themselves or a friend in a safe and confidential environment.”

With the release of Public Act 102-0416 that went into effect July 1 of this year, Safe2Help Illinois or a local suicide prevention resource number is required to go on the back of any issued student identification cards, student handbooks, and any student planner that is custom printed and distributed for students in grades 6 through 12.

Since the program’s launch, Safe2Help Illinois’ top reports have been bullying (18.1%), suicidal ideation as reported by another student (4.7%), and possession and/or use of drugs which include vaping (5.2%).

These are important issues to address. According to the National 4-H Council, 70 percent of teens have experience struggles with mental health. According to a 2020 Harris Poll, 42% of teens admit they’ve been leaning into their vices (e.g. unhealthy food, vaping) and unhealthy coping mechanisms to deal with the impact of COVID-19. Finally, an Illinois Department of Human Services Survey in 2020 found suicide is the third leading cause of death of Illinois youth ages 10-19.

More information on the Safe2Help Illinois program can be found here:

<https://www.safe2helpil.com/>

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