

To the Honourable Wilson,

Minister for Mental Health and Addictions,

Government of Alberta

September 8th, 2025

Dear Minister Wilson,

I am writing to you as a student and mental health advocate— but more importantly, as someone who knows firsthand how unprepared the school system is in recognizing or responding to mental health challenges. Before I proceed, I would like to give credit where credit is due; I deeply appreciate the province's progress on this issue—particularly the Mental Health in Schools Pilot Program, the Mental Health Capacity Building (MHCB) Initiative, and the promotion of whole-school mental wellness. However, I am urging you to go further.

Mental health cannot remain a patchwork of temporary pilots and grant-funded projects. Since its announcement, I haven't heard of any progress that has been made by it. Has the initiative been successful? Regardless, I am a firm believer in

how it must be **permanent, province-wide**, and treated as an essential pillar of youth wellness.

To truly support students across Alberta, I ask that the Ministry prioritize:

1. Permanent, School-Based Mental Health Supports

Invest in regulated school-based professionals—counsellors, social workers, trauma-informed therapists—in every school district. These roles must be **stable, full-time, and equitably funded**, so that access does not depend on a student's postal code or the lifespan of a grant.

While many schools do have guidance counsellors, those counsellors are often responsible for hundreds of students across both academic and emotional concerns. They are expected to serve as crisis responders, post-secondary advisors, and mental health triage—all without adequate mental health backup. There comes a point where counsellors need support too. They need clinical mental health partners, collaborative teams, and manageable caseloads in order to do their jobs effectively and safely.

2. Training Teachers in Emergency and Preventative Mental Health Response

Educators are often the first to notice a student in crisis, yet most have no consistent training on how to respond. We need:

- **Mandatory mental health emergency training** for all teachers and school staff. The Red Cross offers a program dedicated to emergency psychological first aid. This is the link, but I have also attached a QR code to this letter, so that you may scan it to access it. (<https://www.redcross.ca/training-and-certification/course-descriptions/psychological-first-aid/psychological-first-aid>)
- Clear **school-based response protocols** for situations like panic attacks, suicidal ideation, and trauma. Teach teachers the signs of self-harm.
- Ongoing professional development focused on **early intervention**, emotional regulation strategies, and supporting neurodivergent students.
- A school culture that prioritizes **compassion-based response**, not punishment or dismissal. Encouraging students leave a room for a breathing or body break when feeling overwhelmed. Having teachers to hand students a hall pass explicitly stating why they are leaving the classroom is helpful

for both the hall monitor and the student, so that no one is accused of being somewhere they are not supposed to be.

Giving teachers the tools to act with confidence can prevent crises before they begin—and save lives when they do.

3. Mental Health Must Be Taught—CALM Reform Is Critical

As someone who experienced Alberta's Career and Life Management (CALM) course, I can confidently tell you that I learned nothing of value about mental health. While the course is branded as life skills education, I took the summer school version in 2021 and spent more time analyzing advertising techniques than understanding how to manage stress, identify symptoms of depression, or access help in a crisis.

This is a massive oversight—and a dangerous one. CALM is the only mandatory course in Alberta that claims to prepare youth for adulthood. Yet it fails to address:

- Emotional regulation or healthy coping strategies
- ADHD, anxiety, trauma, depression, grief, and healing
- Panic attacks, self-harm, and suicidal ideation
- Therapy, medication, and destigmatizing help-seeking

- Recognizing warning signs in peers or ourselves

Mental health is not a fringe topic. It is an urgent and life-threatening issue for many Alberta youth. According to the Centre for Suicide Prevention, Alberta consistently has some of the highest youth suicide rates in the country (https://www.suicideinfo.ca/local_resource/alberta-suicide-stats-region-age/).

We cannot afford to treat this as taboo. Yes, these are heavy and intimidating topics—but knowledge saves lives. I urge your Ministry to collaborate with Education to completely overhaul the CALM curriculum, embedding real, inclusive, trauma-informed mental health content into every classroom that claims to prepare students for life.

4. Support for Youth-Led Initiatives and Lived-Experience Models

Programs led by youth, for youth, can be transformative. Alberta should fund and empower peer mentorship, school-based advocacy, and safe-in-school programming shaped by lived experience. Encouraging talking about mental health issues, can foster confidence in those who feel alone and afraid.

I recognize that funding is always a concern—but this is not an expense, it's an investment. Alberta already has pilot programs proving successful. Scaling these into permanent, province-wide supports would cost only a fraction of the province's \$9.3 billion education budget or the mental health and addiction portfolio.

Additional options include:

- **Reallocation within existing education and health budgets**—even a 1% shift could dramatically expand mental health services in the education system.
- **Targeted use of the federal Canada Mental Health Transfer**, including bilateral agreements for school-based prevention.
- **Cost-savings from early intervention**, which reduces emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and long-term system strain.
- **Public-private partnerships**, such as collaboration with community organizations or local foundations to support peer programming.

If we are willing to treat mental health like physical health—as something real, urgent, and worth funding—then the path forward becomes clear.

Minister Wilson, the foundation is in place. But we cannot rely on short-term grants to protect long-term lives. It is time to make mental health support a permanent and essential part of every Alberta student's educational experience.

I have sent a similar letter to the Minister of Education and Childcare, the Honourable Nicolaides. I respectfully ask that you both touch base on these letters, in order to pursue a solution.

Sincerely,

Jade Hill

Student | Mental Health Advocate

Founder, *Keep In Mind Advocacy*

owner@keepinmindadvocacy.ca

To the Honourable Nicolaides,
Minister for Education and Childcare,
Government of Alberta

September 8th, 2025

Dear Minister Nicolaides,

I am writing to you as a student, an advocate, and a young Albertan who has seen the cost of inaction when it comes to mental health education. Alberta's youth are navigating overwhelming rates of anxiety, depression, neurodivergence, trauma, and suicide—and yet our school system still treats mental health like a footnote.

Before I dive headfirst into criticizing the CALM curriculum, I would like to give credit where credit is due; I commend the province for launching initiatives like the Mental Health in Schools Pilot Program and the Mental Health Capacity Building (MHCB) Initiative. In all honesty, however, I have not heard anything from the Alberta government discussing the impact and success rate of the program. Has there been some? Regardless, these programs, though meaningful, are not

systemic. We need real, permanent, curriculum-level change, and that responsibility rests within your Ministry and the Ministry for Mental Health and Addiction.

1. CALM Reform: The Course That Forgot Mental Health

The Career and Life Management (CALM) course is Alberta's only mandatory class focused on life skills and wellness, and yet it contains virtually no meaningful education about mental health.

As someone who completed CALM in 2021, I learned about marketing tactics, budgeting, and resume writing—but nothing about panic attacks, therapy, stress, depression, or how to help a friend in crisis.

This is a massive and dangerous oversight.

CALM should be teaching:

- Emotional regulation and coping strategies
- How to recognize signs of anxiety, ADHD, depression, and trauma
- Navigating grief, self-harm, and suicidal ideation
- Accessing support and understanding therapy or medication

- How to help someone who is struggling, and how to ask for help yourself

These are not optional topics. They are life-saving skills. According to the Centre for Suicide Prevention, Alberta continues to have one of the highest youth suicide rates in Canada. (https://www.suicideinfo.ca/local_resource/alberta-suicide-stats-region-age/)

We urgently need a reimagined CALM curriculum—one that reflects the actual lives and struggles of students today.

2. Teacher Training and Preparedness

Teachers are on the front lines. They are the first to notice when something is wrong—but most are **not trained** to recognize the signs of a mental health crisis, let alone respond with confidence.

Your Ministry should implement:

- **Mandatory, recurring mental health training** for all educators. The Red Cross offers a program dedicated to emergency psychological first aid. This is the link, but I have also attached a QR code to this letter, so that you may scan it to access it. (<https://www.redcross.ca/training-and->

[certification/course-descriptions/psychological-first-aid/psychological-first-aid\)](#)

- Protocols for identifying and responding to panic attacks, suicidal ideation, and trauma
- Training on supporting neurodivergent learners and emotionally distressed students
- Resources for proactive, compassion-first approaches—not just emergency interventions

This training should not be seen as extra work. It's critical infrastructure. Teachers need to feel equipped—not overwhelmed—when supporting students in distress.

3. Guidance Counsellors Need Reinforcement

Many schools do have guidance counsellors, and their presence matters. But they are **overloaded**, often balancing post-secondary advising, academics, and crisis support—without any consistent backup.

Counsellors are frequently responsible for hundreds of students. They need:

- Clinical support (e.g., social workers, therapists, school psychologists)
- Reasonable caseloads

- Trauma-informed school leadership that supports rather than isolates them

There comes a time where even the counsellors need support. We are well past that time.

4. Curriculum-Wide Mental Health Literacy

While CALM reform is urgent, the work shouldn't stop there. Mental health needs to be:

- Embedded in **Health** education at every grade
- Reflected in **social studies** through units on identity, belonging, and resilience
- Integrated into **science and biology**, including how the brain and nervous system work. Understanding the mental aspects of fight-flight-or-freeze responses.
- Included in **language arts**, where students can explore identity, grief, and healing through literature. Doing a mental health dive into the psychological effects of Hamlet would be both interesting and beneficial.

Every classroom has the potential to be a space for learning not just facts, but life-saving knowledge.

5. Collaborate Across Ministries

Mental health cannot be siloed. I urge your Ministry to work directly with the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction to:

- Expand school-based mental health services permanently
- Provide curriculum-aligned clinical support in schools
- Ensure that mental health is treated with the **same seriousness as physical health** in education policy

Minister Nicolaides, our education system should prepare us for the real world—not protect us from it.

We are asking you to lead. Not with fear or hesitation, but with a bold vision for what Alberta's students truly need: an education system that understands, teaches, and protects mental health at every level.

Let us grow into strong, resilient adults because our schools gave us the tools—not despite the fact that they didn't.

I have sent a similar letter to the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, the Honourable Wilson. I respectfully ask that you both touch base on these letters, in order to pursue a solution.

Sincerely,

Jade Hill

Student | Mental Health Advocate

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To the Honourable Premier Smith,

Premier,

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I have sent a similar letter to the Minister of Education and Childcare, the Honourable Nicolaides, as well as the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, the Honourable Wilson. I respectfully ask that you touch base on these letters, in order to pursue a solution.

Sincerely,

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To the Honourable Nicolaides,
Minister for Education and Childcare,
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September 8th, 2025

Dear Minister Nicolaides,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding recent efforts to restrict access to certain books within our school systems—particularly those categorized as containing “explicit content.” I understand that the intention behind these actions is to protect students; however, I believe this approach is misguided, harmful, and ultimately incompatible with the goals of public education in a democratic society.

Rather than banning books with mature themes, I propose that Alberta adopt an opt-in permission slip system for young adult (YA) materials flagged for sensitive or explicit content. In this system, parents and guardians would be required to proactively consent to their children accessing such titles—rather than stripping

these resources from entire school communities based on the discomfort of a vocal minority.

Book bans deny all students access to vital stories, experiences, and identities—especially those belonging to marginalized groups. Many of the targeted books feature 2SLGBTQ+ characters, address mental health, or discuss racial and gender-based oppression. These stories are not “harmful”; they are reflective of real lives, often providing youth with validation, understanding, and critical thinking opportunities.

Additionally, what is labeled “explicit” often reflects social discomfort rather than danger. For instance, a book that includes a same-sex relationship is far more likely to be challenged than one featuring gratuitous violence. This reveals not a concern for student welfare, but a political effort to silence voices that challenge a narrow worldview.

Parents absolutely deserve a say in their child’s reading material—but that decision should remain individual, not institutional. A permission-slip system respects:

- **Parental autonomy:** Parents can make informed choices for their own children.
- **Student diversity:** Other families and students retain access to books that reflect their lived experiences.
- **Educator discretion:** Teachers and librarians are not forced to eliminate powerful educational tools from their curricula.

This solution also aligns with how we already handle many other sensitive topics in schools—such as health class or field trips.

Banning books not only limits students—it intimidates educators, curtails curriculum development, and diminishes the role of literature in civic education.

The message being sent is clear: truths that make us uncomfortable should be erased. That is not education. That is indoctrination by omission.

As a student, an advocate, and a member of this province, I urge you to lead with courage. Reframe the current narrative. Protect student access to inclusive

education. Trust families to make informed choices. And uphold the freedom to read as a core democratic principle.

Education should prepare students for the world—not shelter them from it.

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