



Ron DeSantis
46th Governor of Florida



First Lady Casey DeSantis Announces Installation of Telehealth Portals to Provide Mental Health Services in Northwest Florida Schools

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Panama City, Fla. – Today, First Lady Casey DeSantis announced the installation of telehealth portals in 63 public schools throughout six counties in Northwest Florida to provide mental health services to students still recovering from Hurricane Michael. Receiving the portals are Bay, Gulf, Calhoun, Jackson, Liberty and Franklin counties, and all portals will be fully installed by the start of the school year on Monday, August 12.

Joining the First Lady at Bay High School for today's announcement were Department of Children and Families (DCF) Secretary Chad Poppell, Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) Secretary Mary Mayhew, Representative Jay Trumbull, Representative Jason Shoaf, Bay County Schools Superintendent Bill Husfelt and Department of Education Chancellor for K-12 Public Schools Jacob Oliva.

“I was proud to be in Northwest Florida this morning to announce the installation of these portals that will bring the necessary mental health services that our students need and deserve,” **said First Lady DeSantis.** “While this is an innovative, 21st century approach and a promising start to tackling the mental health crisis, we understand that this is just one piece of the puzzle. We want to make sure that people realize that hope is on the horizon and at the end of the day this community will be made whole.”



Photo Credit: Governor's Press Office

The First Lady initially announced that the portals would be coming to Northwest Florida during a visit to Callaway Fire Station in June and returned to Bay High School today to provide updates on the progress of the plan. DCF has been working with vendors to ensure the portals are ready for the start of school on August 12.

Each school will have one portal in a centralized location as determined by the school.

After receiving a referral from a guidance counselor, and written consent from a parent or legal guardian, each student will have the opportunity to speak one-on-one in private with a mental health service provider who will assess, diagnose, and if necessary, begin to treat the student. Parents will have the ability to call into the session via a mobile app or receive a summary from the provider following the session if they are unable to participate. This will be in full compliance with all HIPPA laws.

“By introducing telehealth portals in Panhandle schools, Governor DeSantis and First Lady Casey DeSantis are once again demonstrating their unwavering dedication to quality mental health care access,” **said DCF Secretary Chad Poppell**. “DCF is proud to join them in this effort, ensuring that all Floridians feel safe and comfortable getting the help they need, when they need it.”

“The installation of these telehealth services for public schools in these six Northwest Florida counties will be a valuable resource that students can turn to for their immediate mental health needs,” **said AHCA Secretary Mary Mayhew**. “I commend Governor DeSantis, the First Lady and the Department of Children and Families for swiftly taking action to support the residents of Northwest Florida – who have already shown such incredible perseverance – with this critical access to rehabilitative health care technology.”

First Lady DeSantis also provided updates regarding Hurricane Michael and future disaster recovery efforts. The Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) will be hiring a Recovery Mental Health Coordinator to provide mental health services and coordination following a disaster. The job posting is now online and can be found [here](#). Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education has created a Disaster Recovery Team to respond to disasters and ensure that grant funding and resources are fully utilized. The team will be coming to Florida in the near future to assist with the continued recovery efforts of Hurricane Michael.

“Since day one, Governor DeSantis and First Lady DeSantis have demonstrated a steadfast commitment to Northwest Florida’s recovery from Hurricane Michael,” **said FDEM Director Jared Moskowitz**. “When we came to Bay County on the Governor’s first full day in office, we made it clear that we would support the people of Northwest Florida until they rebuilt stronger than before. Today, we’re building on that commitment and making Florida a leader in mental health recovery by hiring a Recovery Mental Health Coordinator – one of the first in the nation.”

Today’s announcement is part of First Lady DeSantis’ *Hope for Healing Florida* campaign, which strives to combine the resources and efforts of the public and private sectors to better serve Floridians struggling with mental health and substance abuse. For more information on *Hope for Healing Florida*, please visit www.HopeForHealingFL.com.

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