

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
87R16010 GCB-D

C.S.S.B. 64
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Health & Human Services
3/18/2021
Committee Report (Substituted)

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

In 2019, the number of law enforcement officers (LEOs) who died by suicide (228) was nearly double the number killed in the line of duty (132). There were 19 LEO suicides in Texas alone. Several factors affect the mental health of our first responders. LEOs witness numerous critical incidents during their careers. Exposure to trauma such as these incidents can lead to several mental health conditions, including depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). S.B. 64 seeks to provide support to our law enforcement officers by creating a voluntary peer-to-peer support network focused on training LEOs to provide support to each other.

As proposed, S.B. 64 amended current law relating to a mental health program that includes peer-to-peer counseling for certain law enforcement personnel. C.S.S.B. 64 moves the program from the Health and Human Services Commission to the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement to better serve the needs of law enforcement officers.

C.S.S.B. 64 amends current law relating to a peer support network for certain law enforcement personnel.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement in SECTION 1 (Section 1701.622, Occupations Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 1701, Occupations Code, by adding Subchapter M-1, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER M-1. PEER SUPPORT NETWORK FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Sec. 1701.621. DEFINITIONS. Defines "law enforcement officer" and "peer" for this subchapter.

Sec. 1701.622. GENERAL POWERS AND DUTIES. (a) Requires the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) to develop a peer support network for law enforcement officers. Requires that the network include:

- (1) peer-to-peer support;
- (2) training for peer service coordinators and peers that includes suicide prevention training;
- (3) technical assistance for program development, peer service coordinators, licensed mental health professionals, and peers; and
- (4) identification, retention, and screening of licensed mental health professionals.

(b) Requires TCOLE, as part of the peer support network for law enforcement officers, to ensure law enforcement officers have support in both urban and rural jurisdictions.

(c) Requires TCOLE to solicit and ensure that specialized training is provided to persons who are peers and who want to provide peer-to-peer support and other peer-to-peer services under the network.

(d) Authorizes TCOLE to adopt rules necessary to implement Subchapter M-1.

Sec. 1701.623. CONTRACT WITH INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION. Authorizes the commissioner of TCOLE to contract with an institution of higher education that has appropriate expertise in mental health or law enforcement to develop the peer support network under Subchapter M-1.

Sec. 1701.624. CONFIDENTIALITY OF PARTICIPANT INFORMATION. Provides that information relating to a law enforcement officer's participation in peer-to-peer support and other peer-to-peer services under the network is confidential and is prohibited from being disclosed under Chapter 552 (Public Information), Government Code, by TCOLE, a law enforcement agency that employs a law enforcement officer participant, or any other state agency or political subdivision in this state that employs a law enforcement officer participant.

Sec. 1701.625. PROTECTIONS RELATED TO LICENSURE. Prohibits a law enforcement officer's participation in peer-to-peer support and other peer-to-peer services under the network from serving as the basis for a revocation, suspension, or denial of a license issued under Chapter 1701 (Law Enforcement Officers), or being considered in any proceeding related to the officer's licensure under Chapter 1701.

Sec. 1701.626. ANNUAL REPORT. Requires TCOLE, not later than December 1 of each year, to submit a report to the governor and legislature that includes:

- (1) the number of law enforcement officers who received peer support through the peer support network for law enforcement officers;
- (2) the number of peers and peer service coordinators trained;
- (3) an evaluation of the services provided under Subchapter M-1; and
- (4) recommendations for program improvements.

SECTION 2. Requires TCOLE, not later than January 1, 2022, to develop the peer support network for law enforcement officers, as required under Subchapter M-1, Chapter 1701, Occupations Code, as added by this Act.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2021.