

HB21-1030: EXPANDING PEACE OFFICERS MENTAL HEALTH GRANT PROGRAM

Concerning expanding the peace officers mental health support grant program to include partnerships

Details

Bill Sponsors: House – McCluskie (D) and McKean (R)
Senate – Buckner (D) and Cooke (R)

Next Action: Introduction in the House

Bill Summary

The bill expands the peace officers mental health support grant program to include funding for response services to enhance law enforcement's handling of calls for services related to mental health and social service needs, including calls that do not require the presence of a peace officer.

Issue Summary

Peace Officers Mental Health Support Grant Program

The Peace Officers Mental Health Support grant program is housed within the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) is available to provide financial assistance to law enforcement agencies for mental health services including:¹

- On-scene response services to support peace officers' handling of persons with mental health disorders
- Counseling services for officers
- Assistance for law enforcement agencies' development and implementation of policies to support peace officers who are involved in a shooting or a fatal use of force
- Training and education programs that teach peace officers the symptoms of job related mental trauma and how to prevent and treat trauma
- Peer support programs for officers

Examples of On-Scene Response Services

Co-responder Model

The co-responder model partners behavioral health specialists with law enforcement officers to respond to behavioral health-related calls. The teams work to de-escalate the situation and divert individuals to crisis services and assessments instead of arrest and criminal justice involvement. There are generally two approaches to the program, either an officer and a behavioral health specialist ride together in the same vehicle for an entire shift or the behavioral health specialist is called to the scene and the call is handled with an officer.² The goals of the program are to prevent unnecessary incarceration or hospitalization, provide alternative care in the least restrictive environment, prevent duplication of services, and facilitate the return of law enforcement to patrol. A Colorado Health Institute (CHI) evaluation for the Colorado Office of Behavioral Health found that co-responder teams contacted between 16 and 103 individuals per month during response calls from August 2018 to August 2019.³ Overall, the teams responded to 4,357 calls. Over the course of that period the teams were more likely to divert community members from formal actions like arrests, mental health holds, or emergency medical transports. Currently, 44 local governments in Colorado receive funds from the state to operate the program.⁴ Estes Park,

¹ C.R.S. § 24-32-3501

² Office of Behavioral Health (OBH), CO Dept. of Human Services (DHS) (2020). *Co-Responder Programs*. Retrieved from <https://cdhs.colorado.gov/behavioral-health/co-responder>

³ OBH, Colorado Health Initiative (June 2020). *Responding to Behavioral Health Needs*. Retrieved from https://www.coloradohealthinstitute.org/sites/default/files/file_attachments/OBH%20CoResponder%20FINAL.pdf

⁴ OBH, CDHS (July, 2020). *Co-Responder Programs*. Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X6sGTS18Zv4bjEKIcJWA_8DAwFTN_H3v/view

Loveland, and Larimer County receive state funds to operate their co-responder programs. The Fort Collins Police Department operates a co-responder program in partnership with UCHealth.

Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS)

A program in Oregon, Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets (CAHOOTS), is a partnership between the local social service agency White Bird Clinic and law enforcement that is integrated into the public safety systems of two cities, Eugene and Springfield.⁵ The CAHOOTS van, staffed by a trained mental health crisis worker and a medic (nurse, paramedic, or EMT), can be dispatched through the cities' non-emergency call centers and through Eugene's 911 system. The program's services include 24/7 free response is available for non-emergency medical care or first aid, and for a broad range of non-criminal crises, including homelessness, intoxication, disorientation, substance use, and mental health, as well as dispute resolution and conflict mediation. In 2019, out of approximately 24,000 total CAHOOTS calls, police backup was requested only 150 times.⁶

Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) Program

The STAR program in Denver was established in June 2020 as a collaboration between Caring for Denver Foundation, Denver Police Department, Mental Health Center of Denver, Denver Health Paramedic Division, Denver 911, and other community supports/resources.⁷ As it is modeled after the CAHOOTS program, STAR is a mobile crisis intervention in which a mental health clinician and a paramedic is dispatched to provide free medical care, first aid, or mental health support for a broad range of non-criminal emergencies. The STAR service is dispatched through Denver's 911 communications center, and it is intended to divert these types of calls away from police officers. The STAR van operated Monday through Friday from 10am-6pm in central Denver during the six month pilot. A recent evaluation report of the program concluded that in its first six months of operation, the STAR team responded to 748 calls, which could reduce Denver Police Department calls by approximately 2.8 percent.

This Legislation

The bill renames the program to be the Peace Officers Mental Health Support and Community Partnerships grant program. Grants may be provided to law enforcement agencies⁸, peace officer organizations⁹, and public safety agencies¹⁰. Grant funds can be used by recipients for the following amended purposes:

1. On-scene response services to support and enhance law enforcements' handling of calls for service related to persons with mental health disorders and social service needs, including calls that do not require law enforcement presence
2. Counseling services for officers, including the reimbursement of self-paid counseling services
3. Assistance for law enforcement agencies' development and implementation of policies to support peace officers who are involved in a shooting or a fatal use of force
4. Training and education programs that teach peace officers the symptoms of job related mental trauma and how to prevent and treat trauma
5. Peer support programs for officers

The entities that apply for grants from the program are encouraged to collaborate not only with community mental health centers but also other community-based service providers. A public safety agency may apply for a grant for the first purpose in the above list and a law enforcement agency or peace officer organization may apply for a grant for any of the above five listed purposes.

⁵ White Bird Clinic (2018). *Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets*. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthportland.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2018CAHOOTSBROCHURE-1.pdf>

⁶ White Bird Clinic (2020). *What is CAHOOTS?*. Retrieved from <https://whitebirdclinic.org/what-is-cahoots/>

⁷ STAR Program (Jan. 8, 2021). *STAR Program Evaluation*. Retrieved from https://wp-denverite.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/02/STAR_Pilot_6_Month_Evaluation_FINAL-REPORT.pdf

⁸ Colorado State Patrol, Colorado Bureau of Investigation, Department of Corrections, Department of Revenue, county sheriff's offices, municipal police departments, campus police departments, town marshal's offices, Division of Parks and Wildlife

⁹ A statewide association of police officers and former police officers or an organization that provides services and programs that promote mental health wellness of peace officers and has at least one peace officer or former police officer service on its board of directors or in a comparable capacity.

¹⁰ An agency providing law enforcement, fire protection, emergency medical, or emergency response services.

DOLA is to include a summarized report of grant program activities from fiscal year 2017 through 2021 during its annual presentation to the relevant General Assembly committees for the 2022 legislative session. Beginning with the 2023 legislative session, and each session after, DOLA is to include the summarized report in its annual presentation.

Subject to annual appropriation, DOLA may expend money from the Peace Officers Mental Health Support and Community Partnership Fund for the purposes of the program. Up to 5 percent of the funds appropriated may be used to pay for the direct and indirect costs incurred by DOLA's program administration. DOLA can seek, accept, and expend gifts, grants, and donations for the program. For fiscal year 2021-2022, and each year thereafter, DOLA is to expend the first \$2 million of state money for the purposes #2-5 listed above and administrative expenses. If there is any additional state money in excess of the \$2 million, it can begin to be used for the first purpose listed above.

The bill, subject to a petition, takes effect at 12:01am on the day following the expiration of the 90 day period after the final adjournment of the General Assembly.

Reasons to Support

Allowing for funds to be invested in community partnerships will allow for a wider spectrum of responses to calls for service by fostering coordination with behavioral health clinicians, emergency medical service providers, community resources and housing navigators, and service providers. Providing a new means for communities to partner with public safety entities significantly improves response to calls, providing the right level of professionals to scenes for de-escalation, reducing incarceration, and providing proper resources/services to individuals. If calls are addressed by behavioral and medical professionals in a time of crisis/need it may be able to ensure that individuals are not pulled into the criminal justice system but rather the medical or behavioral health system for treatment and care in order to achieve long term success. By partnering with community organizations, these programs ensure that available resources are leveraged to engage individuals where they are, whether they need substance use treatment, detoxification, mental health treatment, de-escalation of situations, or social services. The program continues to fund direct mental health support services for peace officers and intends to open additional opportunities for collaborative responses to calls for service between public safety entities and community-based providers.

Supporters

- Brain Injury Alliance of Colorado
- Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council
- Colorado Coalition for the Homeless
- Colorado Fraternal Order of Police
- Mental Health Colorado

Reasons to Oppose

There is not additional funding for the new activities under the grant program, so it may be difficult for the program to fund the community-based partnerships until the state's budget situation has improved. Additionally, the newly added partnership activities cannot be funded until the first two million dollars available in the program have been granted to entities for the original activities related to the direct mental health of peace officers.

Opponents

- Any opposition has been made public at this time.

About this Analysis

This analysis was prepared by Health District of Northern Larimer County staff to assist the Health District Board of Directors in determining whether to take an official stand on various health-related issues. The Health District is a special district of the northern two-thirds of Larimer County, Colorado, supported by local property tax dollars and governed by a publicly elected five-member board. The Health District provides medical, mental health, dental, preventive, and health planning services to the communities it serves. This analysis is accurate to staff knowledge as of date printed. For more information

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