

SUBJECT: Expanding eligibility for the mental health first aid training program

COMMITTEE: Public Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Aycock, Bohac, Deshotel, Farney, Huberty, K. King,  
VanDeaver

0 nays

4 absent — Allen, Dutton, Galindo, González

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, March 17 — 30-0

WITNESSES: (*On House companion bill, HB 2220*)

For — Gyl Switzer, Mental Health America of Texas; Lee Johnson, Texas Council of Community Centers; Columba Wilson; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Chris Masey, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities; Robin Peyson, Communities for Recovery; Tanya Lavelle, Easter Seals Central Texas; Coby Chase, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute; Greg Hansch and Laura Austin, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Texas; Will Francis, National Association of Social Workers-Texas Chapter; Lauren Dimitry, Texans Care for Children; Ted Melina Raab, Texas American Federation of Teachers; Shannon Noble, Texas Counseling Association; Stacy Wilson, Texas Hospital Association; Michelle Romero and Darren Whitehurst, Texas Medical Association; Yannis Banks, NAACP-Texas; Monty Exter, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Grover Campbell, Texas Association of School Boards; Casey Smith, United Ways of Texas; Marilyn Hartman)

Against — Lee Spiller, Citizens Commission on Human Rights; Lelia Culpepper; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Monica Ayres and seven other individuals)

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Angela Hobbs-Lopez, Department of State Health Services; Sonja Gaines, Health and Human Services Commission)

**BACKGROUND:** Health and Safety Code, sec. 1001.202 requires the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to provide grants to local mental health authorities to contract with persons approved by the department to train employees or contractors of the authorities as mental health first aid trainers. Each fiscal year, DSHS may grant to a local mental health authority up to \$30,000 or 3 percent of the total funds appropriated to the department to make these grants, whichever is less.

Sec. 1001.203 requires the department to make grants to local mental health authorities to provide an approved mental health first aid training program, administered by mental health first aid trainers, at no cost to public school educators. Each fiscal year, DSHS may grant to an authority \$40,000 or 3 percent of the funds appropriated to the department to make these grants, whichever is less.

**DIGEST:** SB 133 would expand the types of employees eligible to receive mental health first aid training and related grants to include school district employees and school resource officers, rather than just educators.

The bill would limit grants provided by the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) for mental health first aid training under Health and Safety Code, sec. 1001.202 and sec. 1001.203 to the lesser of \$70,000 or 3 percent of the total amount appropriated to the department for making grants for mental health first aid training.

A local mental health authority seeking a grant from the department for training school district employees and school resource officers would have to submit a plan for the use of the grant by July 1 of each fiscal year.

DSHS could allocate any unobligated money appropriated to make grants for mental health first aid training for supplemental grants. The department could give these supplemental grants to a local mental health authority that submitted a revised plan for a mental health first aid training program that demonstrated how the additional grant money would be used if made available.

The bill would require certain changes to requirements for local mental health authorities to report on training activities, including changing the dates the reports would be provided to the department.

The bill would repeal Health and Safety Code, sec. 1001.202(c), which limits the funding DSHS may give to a local mental health authority for mental health first aid training. The bill also would repeal Health and Safety Code, sec. 1001.203(b), which limits the funding the department may give to a local mental health authority providing this training to educators.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2015.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

SB 133 would make more public school employees eligible to receive important training in mental health first aid for children and teenagers. This program educates non-medical professionals in strategies and resources to be used in responding to an individual who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a crisis. This is not a diagnostic program. Instead, this program helps provide adults who are constantly around children the training to detect warning signs of any mental or emotional issues.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

SB 133's expanded eligibility could provide individuals, including those with minimal education on mental health issues, with authority to diagnose children. The program provides tools that could be misused in a way that could create a burden for a child and parents. A school employee might conclude that a student was having an emotional or mental crisis, even if that were not the case, and unintentionally mislabel the student.

**NOTES:**

The House companion, HB 2220 by Coleman, was placed on the May 12 General State Calendar but was not considered.