

SUBJECT: Adding mental health first-aid training for veterans and their families

COMMITTEE: Public Health — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — S. Thompson, Frank, Guerra, Lucio, Ortega, Price, Sheffield, Zedler

0 nays

3 absent — Wray, Allison, Coleman

WITNESSES: For — Walter Ivie, American Legion; Rene Hurtado, Emergence Health Network; Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Texas; Jim Brennan, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Cynthia Humphrey, Association of Substance Abuse Programs; Bill Kelly, City of Houston Mayor's Office; Chris Masey, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities; Priscilla Camacho, Dallas Regional Chamber; Julia Egler, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Texas; Lee Johnson, Texas Council of Community Centers; Reginald Smith, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition; Monty Wynn, Texas Municipal League; Allison Greer, The Center for Health Care Services; Nataly Saucedo, United Ways of Texas; and six individuals)

Against — None

On — Tim Keesling, Health and Human Services Commission; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Cruz Montemayor, Texas Veterans Commission)

BACKGROUND: Health and Safety Code sec. 1001.222(a) requires the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to create a mental health intervention program for veterans. The program includes peer-to-peer counseling, suicide prevention training, access to licensed mental health professionals for peer service coordinators and peers, and veteran jail diversion services. Sec. 1001.224 requires DSHS to submit an annual report to the governor and the Legislature on this program.

Government Code sec. 434.352 requires the Texas Veterans Commission and the Department of State Health Services to administer the mental health program for veterans, under which the commission:

- provides training and technical assistance to peer service coordinators and peers;
- identifies, trains, and communicates with community-based licensed mental health professionals and organizations and faith-based organizations; and
- coordinates services for justice-involved veterans.

25 TAC part 1, ch. 412, subch. A, sec. 412.3(6) defines "mental health first aid" as the assistance provided to a person developing a mental health issue or experiencing a mental health crisis until appropriate professional treatment is received or until the crisis is resolved.

Interested parties have noted that the rate of veterans committing suicide in Texas is almost twice as high as the national average and suggest that mental health first aid training could help reduce veteran suicides.

DIGEST:

HB 4429 would require the Texas Veterans Commission to contract with local mental health authorities to provide mental health first aid training to veterans and their immediate family members. The bill would require the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to include this training in its mental health intervention program. DSHS would include in its annual report to the governor and Legislature the number of veterans and immediate family members of veterans who received training.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2019.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a negative impact of about \$2.3 million on general revenue related funds through fiscal 2020-21.