

SUBJECT: Requiring police training on interactions with homeless populations

COMMITTEE: Homeland Security and Public Safety — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — White, Bowers, Goodwin, Harless, E. Morales, Patterson

3 nays — Hefner, Schaefer, Tinderholt

WITNESSES: For — Eric Samuels, Texas Homeless Network; Julie Nitsch and Drew McAngus, Travis County Constable Pct 3; (*Registered, but did not testify*: M Paige Williams, Dallas County District Attorney John Creuzot; Earl Gilbert, Jason Guidangen, and Ricardo Martinez, Equality Texas; Matthew Lovitt, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas; Ashley Harris, United Ways of Texas; Georgia Keysor; Thomas Parkinson; Janice Riley)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Michael Fossum; Zoila Vega-Marchena)

On — Jessica Anderson, Houston Police Department; AJ Louderback, Sheriffs Association of Texas; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Brian Hawthorne, Sheriffs Association of Texas; Cullen Grissom, Texas Commission on Law Enforcement)

BACKGROUND: Occupations Code sec. 1701.352 requires the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement to require an entity that employs peace officers to provide each officer with a training program at least once every 48 months consisting of certain topics.

DIGEST: CSHB 1262 would require a peace officer employed by the law enforcement agency of a political subdivision with a homeless population of at least 25 to complete a one-time training program on trauma-informed techniques to facilitate interactions with homeless youth and adults and on resources available to those individuals.

The training program would have to be completed within two years after the officer was hired. A peace officer who was employed by a law enforcement agency on January 1, 2022, would have to complete the training required under the bill by January 1, 2024.

By January 1, 2022, the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) would have to establish the training program required by the bill and determine and notify which agencies would have to complete the program for each 48-month training cycle.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1262 would ensure peace officers were trained in trauma-informed techniques to facilitate interactions with individuals experiencing homelessness, providing officers with tools to more efficiently communicate, build trust, and encourage cooperation.

Peace officers often interact with people experiencing homelessness, many of whom also suffer from mental health and substance abuse issues. Increasing officers' understanding and awareness of the impact of trauma and developing trauma-informed responses could help in extending needed services and resources to individuals experiencing homelessness, helping guide them away from involvement in the criminal justice system.

To eliminate a need for additional resources, the bill could be amended to apply only to larger cities or counties instead of defining agencies required to complete the training program by a specified homeless population.

**CRITICS
SAY:**

CSHB 1262 continues a trend of piecemeal legislation that would require certain peace officer training. Instead, the Legislature should take a more comprehensive approach and look at peace officer training as a whole to ensure the curriculum, training techniques, and required hours advanced modern and responsive peace officer training in Texas.

Additionally, the bill is unnecessary as it would require the development of a new training course that would overlap with similar training already

required, including on de-escalation.

OTHER
CRITICS
SAY:

CSHB 1262 would cost agency resources both to determine which law enforcement agencies would be required to complete the training program under the bill and to implement the bill in rural counties that do not experience the same population of individuals experiencing homelessness.