

SUBJECT: Establishing a peer support network for certain law enforcement personnel

COMMITTEE: Homeland Security and Public Safety — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — White, Bowers, Goodwin, Harless, Hefner, E. Morales, Patterson, Schaefer, Tinderholt

0 nays

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, March 29 — 31-0

WITNESSES: For — Brian Redburn, Irving Police Department; John Sierega, Texas Municipal Police Association; (*Registered, but did not testify:* T.J. Patterson, City of Fort Worth; Frederick Frazier, Dallas Police Association/FOP716 State FOP Director; James Parnell, Dallas Police Association; David Sinclair, Game Warden Peace Officers Association; Ray Hunt, Houston Police Officers Union; Noel Johnson, Carlos Lopez and Jama Pantel, Justices of the Peace and Constables Association of Texas; Christine Yanas, Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.; Matthew Lovitt, National Alliance on Mental Illness Texas; Brian Hawthorne, Sheriffs Association of Texas; John Chancellor, Texas Police Chiefs Association; Thomas Parkinson)

Against — None

On — Cullen Grissom, Texas Commission on Law Enforcement

BACKGROUND: Concerns have been raised about the incidence of suicide among the nation's law enforcement officers. Some have called for creating a voluntary peer-to-peer support network focused on training peace officers to support each other.

DIGEST: SB 64 would require the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) to develop a peer support network for law enforcement officers by January 1, 2022.

The network would have to include:

- peer-to-peer support;
- training for peer service coordinators and peers that included suicide prevention training;
- technical assistance for program development, peer service coordinators, licensed mental health professionals, and peers; and
- identification, retention, and screening of licensed mental health professionals.

The commission would have to ensure that the peer support network established by the bill would support law enforcement officers in both rural and urban jurisdictions. TCOLE also would be required to solicit and ensure that specialized training was provided to persons who were peers and who wanted to provide peer-to-peer support and other peer-to-peer services under the network. A peer could be a person who was an active or retired law enforcement officer.

TCOLE would be authorized to contract with an institution of higher education that had appropriate expertise in mental health or law enforcement to develop the peer support network.

Confidentiality. Information relating to a law enforcement officer's participation in peer-to-peer support and other peer-to-peer services provided by the network would be confidential and could not be disclosed by:

- the commission;
- a law enforcement agency that employed a law enforcement officer participant; or
- any other state agency or political subdivision in Texas that employed a law enforcement officer participant.

A law enforcement officer's participation in peer-to-peer support and other peer-to-peer services provided by the network could not serve as the basis for revocation, suspension, or denial of a license issued by TCOLE or be

considered in any proceeding related to the officer's licensure.

Annual report. By December 1 of each year, TCOLE would be required to submit a report to the governor and Legislature that included:

- the number of law enforcement officers who received peer support through the peer support network for law enforcement officers;
- the number of peers and peer service coordinators trained;
- an evaluation of the services provided by the network; and
- recommendations for program improvements.

The bill would authorize TCOLE to adopt rules necessary to implement the bill's provisions.

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, 2021.

NOTES:

According to the Legislative Budget Board, the bill would have a negative impact of about \$1 million to general revenue funds through fiscal 2023.