

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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H.B. 1794
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Health & Human Services
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

H.B. 1794 requires the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), not later than December 1, 2017, to establish the Work Group on Mental Health Access for First Responders to develop and make recommendations for improving access to mental health care services for first responders. The bill sets out the composition of the 15-member work group and designates its presiding officer. A work group member expressly is not entitled to compensation for service or to reimbursement for any expenses incurred in performing work group duties. The bill provides for the meeting times of the work group and subjects the meetings to the state open meetings law with a certain exception for meetings by teleconference. The bill requires HHSC to provide administrative support for the work group and requires funding for the administrative and operational expenses of the work group to be provided from the HHSC existing budget. The bill authorizes the work group to accept gifts, grants, and donations from any source to perform a work group duty.

H.B. 1794 requires the work group to develop recommendations to address the difference in access to mental health care services between volunteer fire departments and small law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and emergency medical services providers and large law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and emergency medical services providers; potential solutions for state and local governments to provide greater access to mental health care services for first responders; the sufficiency of first responder organizations' employee health insurance plans for obtaining access to mental health care services for first responders; the sufficiency of first responder organizations' human resources policies; the effectiveness of workers' compensation and other benefit claims for first responders; the feasibility of mental health training during the licensing or certification and renewal process for first responders; the effectiveness of methods for assessing a first responder's mental health care needs after a critical incident; the opportunities for public-private partnerships to provide mental health care services to first responders; and possible Texas-specific barriers, including stigmas, for first responders seeking mental health care services. The bill defines a "first responder organization" as a volunteer fire department or an organization, including a fire department, law enforcement agency, or emergency medical services provider, of a political subdivision of the state that employs a first responder.

H.B. 1794 authorizes the work group to collaborate with the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas at Sam Houston State University (SHSU), the College of Criminal Justice at SHSU, or any other academic institution considered necessary by the presiding officer of the work group in developing the described recommendations and for academic research related to the recommendations. The bill requires the work group to develop a written report of those recommendations and to electronically deliver the report to the governor, the lieutenant governor, and all members of the legislature not later than January 1, 2019. The bill abolishes the work group and the bill's provisions expire June 1, 2019.

H.B. 1794 amends current law relating to the establishment of the Work Group on Mental Health Access for First Responders.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. (a) Defines "executive commissioner," "first responder," "first responder organization," and "work group."

(b) Requires the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), not later than December 1, 2017, to establish the Work Group on Mental Health Access for First Responders (work group) to develop and make recommendations for improving access to mental health care services for first responders.

(c) Provides that the work group is composed of 15 certain members appointed by the executive commissioner of HHSC (executive commissioner), unless otherwise provided.

(d) Provides that the member described by Subsection (c)(1) (relating to providing that one person from HHSC with expertise in the field of mental health care is a member of the work group) is the presiding officer of the work group.

(e) Provides that a work group member is not entitled to compensation for service on the work group or to reimbursement for any expenses incurred in performing work group duties.

(f) Requires the work group to meet at least quarterly at the call of the presiding officer. Provides that work group meetings are subject to the open meetings law, Chapter 551 (Open Meetings), Government Code, except that the work group is authorized to meet by teleconference.

(g) Requires HHSC to provide administrative support for the work group. Requires that funding for the administrative and operational expenses of the work group be provided from HHSC's existing budget. Authorizes the work group to accept gifts, grants, and donations from any source to perform a work group duty.

(h) Requires the work group to develop recommendations to address:

(1) the difference in access to mental health care services between certain first responder departments and agencies;

(2) potential solutions for state and local governments to provide greater access to mental health care services for first responders;

(3) the sufficiency of first responder organizations' employee health insurance plans for obtaining access to mental health care services for first responders;

(4) the sufficiency of certain first responder organizations' human resources policies relating to mental health treatment;

(5) the effectiveness of certain workers' compensation and other benefit claims for first responders;

(6) the feasibility of mental health training during the licensing or certification and renewal process for first responders;

(7) the effectiveness of methods for assessing a first responder's mental health care needs after a critical incident, including certain determinations regarding a standardized post-critical incident checklist and the effectiveness of critical incident stress debriefing programs;

(8) the opportunities for public-private partnerships to provide mental health care services to first responders; and

(9) possible Texas-specific barriers, including stigmas, for first responders seeking mental health care services.

(i) Authorizes the work group, in developing the recommendations described by Subsection (h) of this section, and for academic research related to the recommendations, to collaborate with the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute at Sam Houston State University (SHSU), the College of Criminal Justice at SHSU, or any other academic institution considered necessary by the presiding officer of the work group.

(j) Requires the work group to develop a written report of the work group's recommendations described by Subsection (h) of this section. Requires the work group to electronically deliver the report to the governor, the lieutenant governor, and all members of the legislature not later than January 1, 2019.

(k) Provides that the work group is abolished and this Act expires June 1, 2019.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2017.