

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
88R18921 SCP-F

H.B. 3528
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Local Government
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The International Association of Fire Fighters Center for Excellence states that eight percent of professional firefighters have had suicidal thoughts. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a compensable illness under workers' compensation in Texas for firefighters and police. Unfortunately, there has not been a consistent plan in Texas on how to find healthcare professionals who can identify this disorder early and treat it. Texas firefighters generally have access to health insurance and workers' compensation, but connecting the firefighter to these mental health treatment options has been difficult. More firefighters still die by suicide than in the line of duty. Peer support is an often used tactic to help identify mental illness in the fire service, but it is ineffective in most circumstances and the programs are not staffed by licensed medical professionals.

H.B. 3528 seeks to address this issue by establishing a study group to advise the legislature on future legislation regarding suicide prevention and peer support for firefighters.

H.B. 3528 amends current law relating to the establishment of an advisory committee to study suicide prevention and peer support programs in fire departments in this state.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Commission on Fire Protection in SECTION 2 of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. DEFINITIONS. Defines "commission," "fire department," and "fire fighter."

SECTION 2. ADVISORY COMMITTEE. (a) Requires the Texas Commission on Fire Protection (TCFP) to establish an advisory committee (committee) to study the need to implement suicide prevention and peer support programs in fire departments in this state. Provides that the committee is composed of the following members:

- (1) two fire fighters, appointed by the Texas State Association of Firefighters;
- (2) two fire fighters, appointed by the State Firefighters' and Fire Marshals' Association of Texas;
- (3) two fire chiefs, appointed by the Texas Fire Chiefs Association;
- (4) one person who is licensed to provide professional mental health services, as defined by Section 531.002 (Definitions), Health and Safety Code, appointed by the Texas Fire Chiefs Association;
- (5) one person who is licensed to provide professional mental health services as defined by Section 531.002, Health and Safety Code, appointed by the Texas State Association of Firefighters;

(6) one person who is licensed to provide professional mental health services, as defined by Section 531.002, Health and Safety Code, appointed by the State Firefighters' and Fire Marshals' Association of Texas;

(7) one person, appointed by the executive director of the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service; and

(8) the executive director of TCFP.

(b) Requires the committee to designate a member of the committee as chair of the committee.

(c) Authorizes TCFP to adopt rules necessary to carry out the purpose and duties of the committee under this Act.

(d) Requires TCFP to provide administrative support and resources necessary for the committee to carry out the purpose and duties of the committee under this Act.

(e) Authorizes the committee to meet in person or by telephone conference, videoconference, or other electronic means.

SECTION 3. REPORT. Requires the committee, not later than September 1, 2024, to prepare and submit a report to the governor and the legislature. Requires that the report:

(1) provide an overview of suicide prevention and peer support groups in fire departments;

(2) address possible licensing requirements and any confidentiality concerns; and

(3) provide recommendations on:

(A) the need for legislation to implement suicide prevention and peer support groups in fire departments;

(B) whether to encourage local governments to develop local suicide prevention and peer support groups in fire departments; and

(C) specific programs to be implemented in this state.

SECTION 4. EXPIRATION DATE. Provides that the committee created by this Act is abolished and this Act expires January 10, 2025.

SECTION 5. EFFECTIVE DATE. Effective date: September 1, 2023.