

Public Safety and Security Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5420

AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF AND SERVICES FOR
POLICE OFFICERS, CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS REGARDING POLICE

Title: TRAINING AND CERTAIN REPORTS.

Vote Date: 3/22/2022

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/17/2022

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Public Safety and Security

Co-sponsor(s):

Rep. Corey P. Paris, 145th Dist.

Rep. Christine Palm, 36th Dist.

Rep. John-Michael Parker, 101st Dist.

Sen. Christine Cohen, 12th Dist.

Rep. Robin E. Comey, 102nd Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

No law enforcement unit, shall discharge, discipline, or discriminate against a police officer, who is employed by law enforcement unit solely because the police officer seeks or receives mental health care services, this including behavioral health assessment nor shall surrender his or her firearm, ammunition or electronic defense weapon used in the performance of the police officer's official duties to such law enforcement unit during the time the police officer receives mental health care services. However, this is not applicable to a police officer who seeks or receives mental health care services to avoid disciplinary action by such law enforcement unit or refuses to submit himself or herself to an examination. This bill would require the Training Council to develop a training curriculum for police officer interactions people who have mental or physical incapacities and people who are difficult of hearing and sight. This bill would also initiate further study into determining the percentage of 9-1-1 dispatch calls that would be more appropriately directed to the 2-1-1 Infoline This bill expresses the importance of suitable cash for an emergency intercession preparing for police officers as well as further study of mental health needs of law enforcement officers. After these studies

Training Council and Police Officer Chambers are to appropriately identify barriers to accessing such programs, such as issues regarding confidentiality and disclosure of information regarding treatment and make recommendations to address the mental health needs of officers and encourage officers to access programs. The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services shall then submit a report that includes an examination of the Community and Law Enforcement for Addiction Recovery project, including an analysis of whether such project has been successful and recommendations as to improvements to such project and whether should be expanded throughout the state.

Proposed Substitute Language

The changes in the proposed substitute language in states that no later than July 1, 2023, the Police Officer Standards and Training Council, develop a training curriculum for police officers regarding interactions. Effective as of July 1st, 2022 the sum of one hundred thousand dollars is appropriated to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services from the General Fund, for the purpose of providing grants to nonprofit organizations to provide crisis intervention training for police officers. The task force shall examine the mental health needs of law enforcement officers. Not later than January 1, 2023, the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy at The University of Connecticut, in consultation with the United Way of Connecticut, shall submit a report that shall include a study of a representative sample of 9-1-1 dispatch call data and an analysis of the percentage of such calls that would be more appropriately directed to the 2-1-1 Infoline program. Not later than January 1, 2023, the Police Officer Standards and Training Council as well as the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services shall submit the reports.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Amy Porter, Commissioner of the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS)

supports this bill. The department strongly supports Section 2 of the bill. If enacted, this section of the bill would ensure that the disability community is involved in the development of a training curriculum that increases awareness and maximizes the effectiveness of interactions between police officers and members of the disability community.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Brian Anderson Legislative Director for Council 4 AFSCME's Public Safety Chapter

supports this bill. This bill broadens the protection to include officers who have had an adverse mental health assessment. It is only fair to offer protection to officers who receive a bad assessment or who voluntarily seek treatment. Policing is a high stress field. They support section 4 which sets up a law enforcement officer mental health task force. There are some additional protections that they would like to see in state law, such as a rebuttable presumption for workers compensation behavioral health coverage for police officers.

Connecticut State Senate Christine Cohen supports this bill. As well as in support she also urges the committee to consider such funding which would further the collaboration between Connecticut law enforcement officers with mental health professionals and continue to support and advance the good work officers do to assist those experiencing a mental health crisis every day.

Kathleen Flaherty, ESQ. Executive Director, CT Legal Rights Projects, INC supports this bill. This bill would appropriately recognize that there are consequences for failure to participate in the behavioral health assessments or for seeking care only to avoid discipline. She encourages all the members of the committee to support the exploration of true alternatives to crisis response. Alternatives that do not rely on law enforcement, but instead are community based and community led and do not depend on the legal authority to coerce someone into “care.”

Ed Hawthorne, President of Connecticut AFL-CIO supports this bill. He states that H.B 5240 provides some job protection to police officers who seek behavioral health treatment and broadens the protection to include officers who have an adverse behavioral health assessment. However, section 4 establishes a law enforcement officer mental health task force. They respectfully request that this language be amended to include a seat on the commission for an elected member of the Council 4 AFSCME’s Public Safety Chapter. They also ask that it be amended to include a licensed mental health practitioner specializing in treating law enforcement officers.

Mike Muszynski, State and Federal Relations Manager of The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities supports this bill. CCM supports efforts that will streamline and improve police officer training. In particular, if greater efforts are focused on virtual training opportunities this may assist local departments reduce overtime and travel costs associated with sending officers to complete mandated training at remote facilities.

Louise Pyers, Founder of the CT Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement (CABLE) supports this bill. CABLE strongly supports the changes to subsection (a) of section 7-291d of the general statutes regarding removing possible penalties for any police officer who is referred to mental health services as a result of a behavioral health assessment. Officers should be free to actively participate in such services and encouraged to do so without fear of penalty.

The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity supports this bill. The Commission supports section 2, 4 and 5. The provisions in both Section 2 and 4 of this legislation speak to improving relations from an asset-based approach of better understanding others’ health and our own. Officers will learn how to navigate interactions with people who have mental or physical disabilities, establishing a better interpersonal relationship between them and community. While officers take on bigger workloads, Section 5 of this bill will help alleviate 911 calls that are made but are not emergency situations.

Mark Barillaro, Sandra Baseggio, Laura Berkowitz, Christine Blumberg, Susan Cayer, Annette Cohen, Ellen Creane, Jennifer D’Amato, Marc Degregorio, Therese DeMatteo, Margot DiLieto, Kristine DiMartino, Elizabeth Dock Early, Suzanne Frisch, Kathleen Gambardella, Bonnie Garmisa, Lisa Labadia, Amy Lee, Kate Lee, Jill Lesae, Pat Lore, Susan Lustig, Laretta Lyons, Sonjia Murray, Denise Pale, Julie Schlessel, Divina Schmitt, Eric Tibere, Marjee Daniels Wolfgang residents of Guilford CT, Madison CT, Clinton CT, Branford CT, Branford CT, Shelton CT, Durham CT, and Killingworth CT all support this bill. As awareness among mental health needs grows, so should access to this care for police officers whose occupation may directly expose them to trauma and increased

need of services. Mental health care services should not be subject to discrimination and receipt for officers should be safely available.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT) opposes this bill. They have concerns with House Bill 5420 because of the its failure to reduce the role of policing in our communities, particularly with regard to some of our most vulnerable residents when they are in need of medical care for a mental health crisis.

Reported by: Fabializ N Najera

Date: 3/22/2022