

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1211

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS CENTER PILOT

Title: PROGRAM.

Vote Date: 3/27/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/22/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The state of Connecticut continues to advance proposals to address mental health and substance abuse issues that have become increasingly acute in recent years. The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) is the Connecticut agency charged with providing mental health and substance use treatment and services for adults, aged 18 and older.

This bill requires DHMAS in collaboration with the Department of Child and Family (DCF) to develop a mental health crisis center pilot program in a region of the state chosen by DHMAS. The purpose of the program is to improve the outcomes for people experiencing a mental health crisis by redirecting them away from hospital emergency departments and toward a facility dedicated to providing crisis mental health and substance use services. The commissioner of DHMAS must report on the progress of the program to the Public Health Committee by January 1, 2024.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Nancy Navarretta, Commissioner, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DHMAS):

The Commissioner explained that as the agency mandated to provide mental health services to adults 18 and older, DHMAS has developed a full continuum of crisis services available to individuals in need. However, despite all the services currently in place, DHMAS has recognized the need for a brief care center designed to serve individuals in emotional crisis.

In response to this need, DHMAS is currently in the process of procuring for a mental health crisis center. Due to contracting restrictions, DHMAS is not able to provide details of the proposed project but expects the center to be up and running sometime this year. Since the agency recognizes and appreciates that the Committee is in alignment with its goal on this very important initiative, DHMAS respectfully requests this bill not move forward. DHMAS is happy to continue discussion with the Committee about this ongoing work.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA):

CHA applauds the goals of this bill and appreciates that the pilot program is another step to address the behavioral health crisis and the demand for services before a patient must be admitted to a hospital. However, there are equally pressing needs for support and expansion of services for individuals who must be admitted to the hospital, as well as patients who are discharged but require hospital-sponsored outpatient services. The demand for inpatient psychiatric services is well above the number of available inpatient beds. In its testimony, CHA shares statistics supporting the need to support additional services. CHA points out that neighboring states continue to invest in their behavioral health systems and Connecticut should to the same. CHA asks that the Committee consider taking the following steps to meet current and future demand for behavioral health services:

- **Expand Access to Acute Psychiatric Care by Increasing Medicaid Reimbursement Rates:** Connecticut's Medicaid reimbursement rates do not cover the increasing cost of care.
- **Increase Inpatient Psychiatric Care Capacity:** The state must increase the number of staffed and available acute, intermediate and long-term inpatient beds in state-operated psychiatric hospitals and provide direct operating and capital assistance to any hospital committed to providing additional space, equipment, and the workforce to meet the increasing demand for psychiatric care.
- **Enhance Hospital-sponsored Outpatient Services:** CHA asks the state to direct additional resources to increase access to hospital-based outpatient services including Medicaid rate increases for partial hospitalization programs (PHP), intensive outpatient programs (IOP) and in-home care programs to enable timely and safe discharge, reduce waiting lists and improve access to services.
- **Provide Equitable Medicaid Reimbursement of the Collaborative Care Model (CoCM):** Last year, the General Assembly authorized Medicaid reimbursement for CoCM an evidenced-based model that identifies and treats a growing number of behavioral health conditions. In 2022, the President signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act into law. This law established a grant program that includes cooperative agreements with states supporting integrated care models such as CoCM. CHA urges the Department of Social Services (DSS) to avail itself of this new support model.

The following individuals representing hospitals across the state submitted testimony with the same comments as CHA:

- Vincent Capece, Jr., President and CEO, Middlesex Health
- Ann Hogan, Sr Government Relations Officer, Yale New Haven Health

- Charles Herrick, MD, Chair of Psychiatry, Nuvance Health- Danbury, New Milford, Norwalk and Sharon Hospitals

Jamie Rodriguez, Advocacy Chair for the CT Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (CT AMFT) and Rebecca Ruitto, Chair of the CTAMFT:

Ms. Rodriguez and Ms. Ruitto represent CTAMFT an organization with 2,000 members. The influx of mental health patients entering emergency rooms is expected to continue as we emerge from the pandemic. For many in a mental health crisis, extended periods waiting in a busy emergency room or hallway for an evaluation, as well as an available bed, simply exacerbates symptoms. For children and adolescents, this experience can be traumatic and overwhelming. The program proposed in this bill will help redirect these patients to an appropriate mental health facility for treatment in a timely manner and in a setting not overwhelmed by other medical needs. CTAMFT asks that the Committee Support this bill.

Also submitting testimony in support of this bill:

- State resident, Kayla Bertussi
- Parent, Melissa McGarry

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Kathleen Panazza

Date: April 5, 2023