

Date: 2-8-21

House Health and Human Services Committee

Bill: HB 248 Mental Health Support Program for First Responders

Sponsor: Rep. Kwan

Floor Sponsor:

UASD Position: Support

This Bill: relates to mental health resources for first responders.

Discussion: Rep. Kwan explained that this is a grant program for 1 million dollars to expand or begin mental health support programs for first responders. She noted that there is an amendment. Lanye Hilton, Behavioral Health and Wellness Officer for Unified Fire Authority, spoke about the mental health needs of first responders in the Salt Lake Valley. First responders are more likely to die of suicide than from issues on the job. Former chief Randy Watt said he instituted an assessment program to assess the need among his officers. Many came back as high-risk, as well as some officers' family members. Rep. Kwan explained that this program is for first responders, not specifically for family. Becky Pickle spoke as the spouse of a 20-year firefighter. She spoke about her husband's struggle with PTSD. It has resulted in significant financial expenses. Rep. Acton asked how the grant program will work. Rep. Kwan said the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health will put together the program. It could be used for the assessment program, expanding peer support programs, or expanding treatment programs. They will provide a report with metrics on how many first responders were helped, the details of each project, and what we've learned. Rep. Nelson asked what a first responder district is. Rep. Kwan said that will be addressed in the amendment. In other parts of the statute, a district is defined as an agency. In her amendment, it will be expanded to include any political subdivision that employs first responders. Rep. Nelson asked if this is an ongoing program or a new one. Rep. Kwan said she would like to see it ongoing. However, the funding is difficult to secure. She believes the best way to fund it is one time this year to get the data from the program so they can later bring it back as an ongoing program. Rep. Nelson asked if the grant program requires financial participation by the receiving districts. Rep. Kwan said it does not, so that smaller districts are not competing with larger districts. Taryn Hiatt spoke on behalf of the Utah Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention in support of the bill. Carson Eilers spoke on behalf of the Utah League of Cities and Towns in support of the bill. A veteran spoke about his experience and voiced support. David Spatafore spoke on behalf of the Utah Chiefs of Police Association and Utah Fire Chiefs Association in support of the bill. He said there's no question

that the ultimate cost should be paid by the agency. They bear that cost through the insurance and salaries they pay. The bill was amended.

Yeas: 11

Nays: 0

N/V: 2

Outcome: HB 248 passed as amended with a favorable recommendation.

Bill: SB 47 Mental Health Crisis Intervention Council

Sponsor: Sen. Thatcher

Floor Sponsor: Rep. Romero

UASD Position: Tracking

This Bill: creates the Mental Health Crisis Intervention Council to establish protocols and standards for the training and functioning of local mental health crisis intervention teams.

Discussion: Rep. Romero said this bill brings everyone in the mental health world together to form a council and recommend standards for crisis intervention training (CIT). David Spatafore spoke on behalf of the Utah Chiefs of Police Association in support of the bill. There are currently two major organizations that provide CIT to law enforcement officers. They have a competitive relationship. When it comes to CIT, the more training officers get, the better off they are and the better off the public is. This bill creates an overarching umbrella of six law enforcement officers and six mental health professionals or family members of mentally ill people. They will put together the best CIT practices. Rep. Nelson asked if there is an overlap or conflict with the Behavioral Health Crisis Responsibility Commission. Mr. Spatafore said the new council will solely deal with police officers. Rep. Eliason said he thought the two sides were getting very close to an agreement without the need for legislation. Mr. Spatafore said both organizations support the creation of this council. Neither group has any preconditions. Taryn Hiatt spoke on behalf of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention in support of the bill. Andrew Riggle spoke on behalf of the Disability Law Center.

Yeas: 10

Nays: 0

N/V: 3

Outcome: SB 47 passed with a favorable recommendation.

Bill: SB 53 Behavioral Emergency Services Amendments

Sponsor: Sen. Thatcher

Floor Sponsor: Rep. Burton

UASD Position: Tracking

This Bill: enacts requirements and provisions relating to behavioral emergency services technicians.

Discussion: Sen. Thatcher said no state has ever attempted to create a certification program for emergency medical services focusing on behavioral health. This bill requires the Department of Emergency Medical Services to approve a curriculum for a behavioral emergency services technician. It also creates an advanced behavioral emergency services technician so that it mirrors the licensing for emergency medical technicians (EMTs). This will take some of the burden off of Mobile Crisis Outreach Teams via a tiered response. Rep. Nelson asked if it's possible that certain individuals could be dual-licensed. Sen. Thatcher confirmed that, and expects that EMTs will be the primary people who seek this training. Rep. Nelson asked who decides which class to send out. Sen. Thatcher said those processes are already developed in the Department of Emergency Services. Rep. Nelson asked if this service will spread throughout the state. Sen. Thatcher said yes. This will not be mandated, but it is an option. Taryn Hiatt spoke on behalf of the Utah Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention in support of the bill.

Yeas: 9

Nays: 0

N/V: 4

Outcome: SB 53 was passed with a favorable recommendation.