

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5145

As Reported by House Committee On:
Public Safety

Title: An act relating to community assistance referral and education services.

Brief Description: Allowing fire departments to develop a community assistance referral and education services program.

Sponsors: Senators Keiser, Conway, Eide, Kohl-Welles, Shin and Schlicher.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Public Safety: 3/5/13, 3/12/13 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended by Committee)

- Authorizes fire departments to implement a community assistance referral and education services program to assist local residents who use the 911 system for low acuity assistance calls.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Goodman, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Klippert, Ranking Minority Member; Hayes, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Holy, Hope, Moscoso, Ross and Takko.

Staff: Yvonne Walker (786-7841).

Background:

There are many individuals who find themselves in need of assistance but because they have nowhere else to turn, their first call is to 911. This first call to 911 is often a predictor of future 911 use as emergency providers are able to correct the immediate problem that is taking place.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Many local communities have developed a "Fire Department-Community, Assistance, Referrals, and Education Services" (FDCARES) program. The FDCARES is a fire department-based community injury and illness prevention program. The FDCARES programs have been developed to interact directly with community members in an effort to prevent injury and illness and to help prevent the need for future emergency services for these individuals as well.

Emergency service prevention assists in preventing ambulance transportations, emergency room visits, and associated costs to both the individuals as well as insurance providers. The goal of the FDCARES program is to keep emergency service providers available for more acute type incidents as well as keep hospital emergency rooms from being overcrowded and alleviate the need for patient diversions.

Four local fire agencies have developed the FDCARES programs including: the Kent Regional Fire Authority, the Olympia Fire Department, the SeaTac Fire Department, and South King County Fire and Rescue.

In 2003 the Legislature required the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Board) to address the health care personnel shortage by facilitating ongoing collaboration among stakeholders. The Board, in collaboration with these stakeholders, was to establish and maintain a state strategic plan for ensuring an adequate supply of health care personnel that safeguards the ability of the health care delivery system in the state in order to provide quality, accessible health care to Washington residents. The Board must submit an annual report to the Governor and the Legislature on progress of the state plan and make recommendations as necessary.

Accordingly, the Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force (Task Force) was created. The Task Force has 20 members, representing business, labor, education, and government. The Task Force facilitates ongoing collaboration among stakeholders to address the health care personnel shortage and establishes and maintains a state strategic plan for ensuring an adequate supply of personnel.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Local fire departments are authorized to develop a community assistance referral and education services program (program) to provide community outreach and assistance to local residents. This prevention assistance program must identify community members who use the 911 phone number for low acuity assistance calls (non-emergency or non-urgent calls) and help direct these citizens to their primary care providers, other health care professionals, low-cost medication programs, and other social services. A non-emergency contact number may also be distributed as an alternative resource to the 911 system.

To assist in developing the FDCARES program, a fire department may consult with the Task Force to identify health care professionals capable of working in a nontraditional setting and providing assistance, referral, and education services. Health care professionals may be hired as needed to assist with the FDCARES program.

Each program that is established must annually measure: (1) the reduction in the number of phone calls from those that repetitively used the 911 emergency system; (2) the reduction in avoidable emergency room trips attributed to implementation of the program; and (3) the estimated amounts of Medicaid funding that would have been spent on emergency room visits if the FDCARES program had not existed. Upon request, the results must be reported to the Legislature or other local governments.

Fire departments may seek grants and private gifts in order to support its program.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The amendment specifies that low acuity assistance calls are calls such as those that are non-emergency or non-urgent.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Acuity is a medical term that is used commonly in the world of 911 responses. There are an incredible amount of 911 calls that result in runs by firefighter paramedics to the emergency room. Emergency rooms are very expensive places to treat low acuity events. Emergency rooms should be reserved for more authentic emergencies. Due to today's technology, there is a way to find out the people in the community who are calling 911 repeatedly for instances that do not rise to a real emergency visit. Many of these individuals are indigent or on Medicaid and these emergency room trips end up being paid by taxpayer dollars.

This bill is intended to be a good government bill. The City of Kent piloted the FDCARES program approximately two years ago. When the fire service started with Emergency Management Systems, they defined emergency by allowing members of the community to determine what an emergency is. This bill is to help define what an emergency is and what is not an emergency and direct those citizens to the appropriate levels of care.

There is no overlap between the fire department education services and the FDCARES program. These are two separate divisions. The FDCARES program is housed within the operations division of the fire department whereas the education division is housed within the public information division of the fire department.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Keiser, prime sponsor; Geoff Simpson, Washington State Council of Firefighters; and Mitch Snyder, Kent Fire Department.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.