

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5644

As Passed House - Amended:

March 4, 2022

Title: An act relating to providing quality behavioral health co-response services.

Brief Description: Concerning providing quality behavioral health co-response services

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Behavioral Health Subcommittee to Health & Long Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Wagoner and Frockt).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

College & Workforce Development: 2/21/22, 2/23/22 [DPA].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/4/22, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill (As Amended by House)

- Requires the University of Washington (UW) to consult with stakeholders in the field of co-response to establish regular opportunities for training and exchange of best practices related to co-response.
- Requires the UW to create an assessment of current capacities and characteristics of co-response teams and recommendations for future state goals, and to report the assessment to the Governor and the Legislature.
- Requires the UW to develop model curricula for training members of co-response teams.
- Requires the UW to host an annual conference beginning in 2023 that draws state and national co-response teams.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COLLEGE & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Slatter, Chair; Entenman, Vice Chair; Leavitt, Vice Chair; Chambers, Ranking Minority Member; Jacobsen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Hansen, Hoff, Kraft, Paul, Pollet and Sells.

Staff: Elizabeth Allison (786-7129).

Background:

Co-Response.

Co-response is when first responders, such as fire and police, are paired with non-law enforcement behavioral health professionals when responding to emergency situations involving behavioral or mental health crises. Co-response teams can perform follow up services, case management, outreach, transportation, and resource navigation. The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs implements the Mental Health Field Response Grant Program which provides grants to local law enforcement agencies to fund co-response programs.

Co-Responder Outreach Alliance.

The Co-Responders Outreach Alliance (CROA) is a statewide nonpartisan organization of first responders, behavioral health professionals, and project managers working in the co-response field. The organization was created in 2018 and represents police and fire agencies from across the state.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the University of Washington (UW) must, in consultation with the CROA and other stakeholders in the field of co-response:

- establish regular opportunities for police, fire, emergency medical services, peer counselors, and behavioral health personnel working in co-response to convene for training and best practices activities, and assist the UW with such co-response activities;
- subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, administer a small budget to help defray costs for training and professional development;
- develop and provide an assessment to the Governor and the Legislature by June 30, 2023, describing and analyzing various aspects of co-response such as current capacities, shortfalls, alignments, data systems, training practices, and funding strategies for statewide co-response teams and recommendations for the future state crisis response system;
- beginning in 2023, begin development of a model training curricula for individuals participating in co-response teams; and
- beginning in 2023, host an annual statewide conference that draws state and national

co-responders.

Stakeholders may include: the Washington Association of Designated Crisis Responders; state associations representing police, fire, and emergency medical services personnel; the Washington Council on Behavioral Health; the state enhanced 911 system; 988 crisis call centers; and the Peer Workforce Alliance.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There have been efforts to look at the way law enforcement officers in Washington interact with community members to help them get services rather than putting them through the revolving door of the criminal justice system. These services are currently done on an ad hoc basis. There are effective programs but they are scattered. There has been enough experience now to formalize the process of co-response. The goal is to have a unified team. The CROA and law enforcement are a natural alliance. This bill ensures that teams go out and work in the most beneficial way. Stakeholders are supportive of the bill because of the value of creating a standardized process around co-response safety and de-escalation. The CROA is made up of law enforcement and behavioral health clinicians.

(Opposed) The main issue with the bill is rooted in the problem it is trying to solve. Any training for assessing trauma should not use coercive practices. Such practices have harmful consequences including physical trauma. They are so widely used that they seem to be unavoidable. Using non-consensual tactics is a violation, and co-response methods will continue to be misused unless this is addressed. The response should be person first instead of co-response. There is no evidence that coercive practices offer any benefit. Components that are non-coercive should be included in the training and lead the way with preventing trauma.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Keith Wagoner, prime sponsor; and Brook Buettner, North Sound RADAR Navigator Program.

(Opposed) Kathleen Wedemeyer, Citizens Commission on Human Rights.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.