



State Budget Amendments

Current Law

The state budget does not adequately fund mental health programs

Problem

Schools do not have the resources to adequately address mental health challenges in the student population.

Proposed Legislative Change

1. Fund and require establishment of threat assessment teams and mental health counselors to help identify students who may pose a threat to themselves or others, and to respond in times of crises. These teams will provide the appropriate intervention and communication plans.

Behavioral threat assessment teams should be designed to evaluate and manage threats on and off campus. Coupled with mental health teams, these evaluations can aide in sorting out miscommunicated reports from true concerns, as well as offer support and normalization to students in times of tragedy. These teams also provide a process in helping intervene with a person who may be planning an act of violence.

2. Allocate Funding to Facilitate Required Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Trauma-Informed Trainings by Educators.

Expand funding to existing and new hospital-based violence intervention programs. These programs involve a comprehensive approach that identifies patients at risk for repeat violent injury, and links them with hospital and community-based resources aimed at addressing underlying risk factors for violence.

3. Expand Funding for Mental Health First Aid Training for Law Enforcement. Expand the HHSC reimbursement model to include reimbursement for training law enforcement officers in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA).

Mental Health First Aid trainings, based upon a nationally approved model, are currently funded by the Texas Legislature for teachers, child-serving personnel and school resource officers. Each year, HHSC is required to report to the legislature records of, "Local Mental Health Authority employees and contractors trained as MHFA trainers during the preceding fiscal year; university employees, school district employees, and school resource officers who completed an MHFA training program provided by a LMHA during the preceding fiscal year; and individuals from the community who are not employed by a university or school district who completed an MHFA training program provided by a LMHA during the preceding fiscal year. "

According to HHSC, "MHFA is an eight-hour, evidence-based curriculum teaching individuals how to help someone developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. MHFA training increases awareness of mental health, reduces stigma around mental illness, and teaches individuals how to assess a situation, provide assistance, and connect someone with a mental health issue to resources."

The MHFA website describes the benefits specifically relating to law enforcement officers as follows: "The course is taught to police, first responders, corrections officers, and other public safety audiences around the country. Mental Health First Aid for Public Safety provides officers with more response options to help them deescalate incidents and better understand mental illnesses so they can respond to mental health related calls appropriately without compromising safety."

Extending funding for MHFA training beyond the school campus would allow for a greater understanding of mental health issues by law enforcement officers and the opportunity to de-escalate crises before they become violent.

4. Expand Funding Dedicated to Harris County Psychiatric Center
Increase funding for Harris County Psychiatric Center's mental health services, specifically funding wrap-around services including step-down programs and housing supports, to keep up with growing population demands and benefits of stronger outpatient programs.

According to the Texas Council, "From 1964 to 2016, the Texas population rose from 10.3 to 28.2 million people, almost tripling in just over fifty years. Despite astounding population growth, the number of inpatient psychiatric beds in Texas State Hospitals shrank by almost 80% during this time, from 14,921 to 3,013 beds. Demand for both forensic and civil psychiatric beds far outpaces current State Hospital system capacity, placing severe strain on local communities, jails and hospital systems."

Additional funding for the Harris County Psychiatric Center, which serves as the primary care-giver of in-patient indigent individuals suffering mental health crises in Harris County, would allow for additional in-patient beds and increase capacity of the public system. It would also create funding streams for essential step-down programs, such as supportive housing for individuals upon release, to reduce recidivism to jails and emergency rooms and promote recovery.

5. Authorize Funding to Evaluate Transmission of Mental Health Records from Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) to National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS)

Authorize funding to reinstate the Department of Public Safety / TX Office of Court Administration task force charged with ensuring the efficient and effective transmission of mental health records to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System.

In the fall of 2011, the Texas NICS Record Improvement Task Force was established to develop strategic planning for the improvement of the quality and availability of prohibiting mental health adjudication and commitment records in Texas used by NICS. The Texas NICS Mental Health Record Improvement Plan, a requirement of the grant OCA received under the FY 2011 NICS Act Record Improvement Program, is the result of their work.

The work, completed in 2011, has not been evaluated in the years following release of the report. The Commission recommends the creation of a task force to ensure records are continuing to be transmitted efficiently and effectively.



Administrative Changes

Current Law

Texas law does not adequately address standard response protocol measures and training drills for active shooter situations.

Problem

Schools and law enforcement need additional tools to communicate and respond effectively during crisis situations.

Proposed Legislative Change

1. Mandate standardized response protocol measures (as a part of their required Multi-Hazard Emergency Operations Plan). Implementing a standard response protocol with standardized vocabulary and concepts that will aide in allowing law enforcement, school faculty, and first responders in communicating during crisis response times.

Training with the same language across the board will prove helpful for all responders at the scene of an incident. For example, clear directions over the school's PA system during an emergency response situation to: "Lockdown", "Lockout", and "Hold."

These standardized words will clear any confusion and help in lowering response times of the students and faculty on campus. The recommendation should look to the Standard Response Protocol (SRPs) adopted by the Texas School Safety Center, Clear Creek ISD and I Love U Guys Foundation.

2. Mandate for Active Shooter Training Drills for School Districts. The Legislature and the Texas Education Agency require the Tri-Annual Safety and Security Audit. They should add standardized active shooter protocols as part of their mandate. Such protocols will prove tremendously helpful in lowering miscommunication and response times between all responders.

Require training for all school district security divisions to attend informative training sessions on Active Shooter Situations.

School districts should have coordinated training courses in conjunction with first responders, which will aid in reducing the learning curve and response time when law enforcement and school security personnel react to an active shooter crisis on school campuses.