



ENHANCING 911

INTEGRATING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INTO OUR EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEM

H.2461 An Act to enhance 911 operations for behavioral health crisis response
S.1567 (Rep. Brandy Fluker Oakley, Sen. Julian Cyr)

Law enforcement is currently the default emergency response for a behavioral health crisis. This bill enhances 911 operations to better serve individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis by adding individuals to the 911 Commission, requiring additional training for 911 telecommunicators, and establishing a grant program for 911 call centers to update their call scripts, call codes, and dispatch protocols. By setting up this infrastructure, this bill helps to foster an alternate response by trained behavioral health professionals instead of law enforcement whenever possible, avoiding unnecessary arrest, injury, and death.

THE PROBLEM

- There is a lack of a coordinated system of behavioral health urgent and crisis care, which allows law enforcement to become the default emergency response for behavioral health crisis.
- With law enforcement as the default 911 responders, a call for help in a behavioral health crisis too frequently results in arrest, injury, and even death. An alternative type of responder is needed. The 911 dispatch system is a critical first step to diverting behavioral health calls to those alternate responders.

WHAT THIS BILL ACHIEVES

- Adds behavioral health professionals and people with lived experience to the state 911 Commission.
- Requires crisis intervention training for certified “enhanced 911” telecommunicators and diversion of individuals with behavioral health conditions from law enforcement to behavioral health providers when appropriate.
- Establishes a grant program for local 911 call centers to update 911 call scripts, call codes, and dispatch protocols to better identify behavioral health emergencies.
- Seeks to increase formal relationships between local 911 call centers and behavioral health crisis support, including suicide prevention lifelines, Emergency Service Providers, and others.

WHY THIS MATTERS

With passage of this bill, Massachusetts would take necessary steps toward ensuring our existing emergency response system is better able to triage individuals in behavioral health crisis away from law enforcement by integrating qualified behavioral health professionals as a primary response type in the 911 system.

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