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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Senator Nancy Skinner, Chair  
2019 - 2020 Regular

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**Bill No:** AB 680                      **Hearing Date:** July 2, 2019  
**Author:** Chu  
**Version:** June 24, 2019  
**Urgency:** No                              **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** JK

**Subject:** *Public Safety Dispatchers: Mental Health Training*

### HISTORY

**Source:** National Alliance on Mental Illness- California

**Prior Legislation:** SB 11 (Beall), Ch. 468, Stats. 2015

**Support:** American Civil Liberties Union of California; Arc and United Cerebral Palsy California Collaboration; Bay Area Community Services; California Association of Joint Powers Authorities; California Attorneys for Criminal Justice; California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies; California Hospital Association; California Public Defenders Association; California Statewide Law Enforcement Association; Disability Rights California; City of Santa Clara; Counseling and Support Services for Youth; County Behavioral Health Directors Association of California; County of Santa Clara; Disability Rights California; East Bay Legislative Coalition; Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department; Mental Health America of Northern California; Mental Health Association of Alameda County; National Alliance on Mental Illness-California; National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter; Peace Officers' Research Association; Riverside Sheriffs' Association; San Diego County District Attorney; Steinberg Institute

**Opposition:** None known

**Assembly Floor Vote:** 76 - 0

### PURPOSE

*The purpose of this bill is to require the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), on or before January 1, 2021, to develop mental health training courses for local public safety dispatchers.*

*Existing law* requires POST to adopt rules establishing minimum standards relating to the recruitment and training of local public safety dispatchers having a primary responsibility for providing dispatching services for local law enforcement agencies described in subdivision (a), which standards shall apply to those cities, counties, cities and counties, and districts receiving state aid. (Pen. Code, § 13510.)

*Existing law* requires that the course of basic training for law enforcement officers include adequate instruction in specified procedures and techniques relating to the handling of persons with developmental disabilities or mental illness. (Pen. Code § 13519.2 (a).)

*Existing law* requires that the course of instruction relating to the handling of developmentally disabled or mentally ill persons be developed in consultation with appropriate groups and individuals having an interest and expertise in this area, and that it include information on the cause and nature of developmental disabilities and mental illness, as well as the community resources available to serve these persons. (Pen. Code § 13519.2 (b).)

*Existing law* requires POST to establish and keep updated a continuing education classroom training course relating to law enforcement interaction with persons with mental disabilities. (Pen. Code, § 13515.25 (a).)

*Existing law* requires the POST continuing education course relating to law enforcement interaction with persons with mental disabilities to include all of the following:

- 1) The cause and nature of mental illnesses and developmental disabilities;
- 2) How to identify indicators of mental disability and how to respond appropriately in a variety of common situations;
- 3) Conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques for potentially dangerous situations involving a person with a mental disability;
- 4) Appropriate language usage when interacting with a person with a mental disability;
- 5) Alternatives to lethal force when interacting with potentially dangerous persons with mental disabilities;
- 6) Community and state resources available to serve persons with mental disabilities and how these resources can be best utilized by law enforcement to benefit the mentally disabled community; and,
- 7) The fact that a crime committed in whole or in part because of an actual or perceived disability of the victim is a hate crime. (Pen. Code, § 13515.25 (b).)

*Existing law* requires POST to establish and keep updated a classroom-based continuing training course that includes instructor-led active learning, such as scenario-based training, relating to behavioral health and law enforcement interaction with persons with mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders. (Pen. Code, § 13515.27 (a).)

*Existing law* requires the instructor-led active learning course to be at least three consecutive hours, may include training scenarios and facilitated learning activities, shall address issues related to stigma, shall be culturally relevant and appropriate, and shall include all of the following topics:

- 1) The cause and nature of mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders;
- 2) Indicators of mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders;
- 3) Appropriate responses to a variety of situations involving persons with mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders;
- 4) Conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques for potentially dangerous situations;
- 5) Appropriate language usage when interacting with potentially emotionally distressed persons;
- 6) Resources available to serve persons with mental illness or intellectual disability; and,
- 7) The perspective of individuals or families who have experiences with persons with mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders. (Pen. Code, § 13515.27 (b).

*Existing law* requires POST to provide mental health training as part of its basic course for peace officers that address issues related to stigma, shall be culturally relevant and appropriate, and shall include all of the following topics:

- 1) Recognizing indicators of mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders;
- 2) Conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques for potentially dangerous situations;
- 3) Use of force options and alternatives;
- 4) The perspective of individuals or families who have experiences with persons with mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders; and,
- 5) Mental health resources available to the first responders to events that involve mentally disabled persons. (Pen. Code, § 13515.26 (a) and (c).)

*Existing law* requires the basic course of instruction for peace officers relating to persons with a mental illness, intellectual disability, or substance use disorder to be at least 15 hours, and include training scenarios and facilitated learning activities relating to law enforcement interaction with persons with mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders. (Pen. Code, § 13515.26 (d).)

*Existing law* requires POST to establish and keep updated a classroom-based continuing training course that includes instructor-led active learning, such as scenario-based training, relating to behavioral health and law enforcement interaction with persons with mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders. (Pen. Code, § 13515.27 (a).)

*Existing law* requires the continuing training course relating to behavioral health and law enforcement interaction with persons with mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders to be at least three consecutive hours, and states that it may include training

scenarios and facilitated learning activities, shall address issues related to stigma, shall be culturally relevant and appropriate, and shall include all of the following topics:

- 1) The cause and nature of mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders;
- 2) Indicators of mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders;
- 3) Appropriate responses to a variety of situations involving persons with mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders;
- 4) Conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques for potentially dangerous situations;
- 5) Appropriate language usage when interacting with potentially emotionally distressed persons;
- 6) Resources available to serve persons with mental illness or intellectual disability; and,
- 7) The perspective of individuals or families who have experiences with persons with mental illness, intellectual disability, and substance use disorders. Pen. Code, § 13515.27 (b.)

*This bill* requires POST to develop mental health training courses for local public safety dispatchers, on or before January 1, 2021, as follows:

- 1) The Public Safety Dispatchers' Basic Course shall incorporate topics listed in Section 13515.26. Learning objectives for the required mental health topics shall be indicated as learning objectives for each relevant learning domain in the commission's Public Safety Dispatchers' Basic Course.
- 2) A continuing training course that covers topics listed in Section 13515.27 (b). Learning objectives for the required mental health topics shall be indicated as learning objectives for each relevant learning domain in the commission's Public Safety Dispatchers' Basic Course.
- 3) The courses of instruction and the standards for the training shall be developed by POST in consultation with appropriate groups and individuals having required expertise in the field of mental health. The groups and individuals shall include, but not limited to, law enforcement agencies, dispatchers, dispatcher academy instructors, subject matter experts, and members of the public.
- 4) The commission, in consultation with relevant groups and individuals, shall review existing training programs, as needed, to determine the ways in which mental health illness may be included as part of ongoing programs.

## COMMENTS

### 1. Need for This Bill

According to the author:

Dispatchers, as a critical link in the chain for any response by peace officers, will be better equipped to identify, collect, and relay information regarding mental health issues in a manner that improves safety for all involved including the individual in crisis, family members, bystanders and first responders.

Only 4% of the general population experiences mental health issues that severely impact or limit their daily activities or functioning in any given year. However, according to data provided by the California Highway Patrol, at least 16% of officer-involved shootings from 2011-2014 involved people with mental illness diagnoses or strong indications of mental illness. This exceeds an estimate previously provided by the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), which was that approximately 10-15% of police contacts with people experiencing mental health issues resulted in use of force. Furthermore, at least 20% of incarcerated adults have a recent history of mental illness, and more than half of Americans with a mental health issue go untreated.

In addition to the human toll, the State and municipalities spend significant funds policing and incarcerating people with mental illnesses, intellectual disabilities, and substance use disorders. Many of these individuals can be identified, referred, and treated as a result of police contact in a manner that ensures public safety, is more cost-effective, and helps the individual reach needed services. AB 680 will help dispatchers play an important role in this process by both relaying information to police and, when available, also dispatching special resources trained to assist with mental health issues (such teams are available in certain jurisdictions like Santa Clara County and Los Angeles County).

### 2. Public Safety Dispatcher Training

The Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) was established by the Legislature in 1959 to set minimum selection and training standards for California law enforcement. They provide specialized training to meet requirements set forth by the legislature.

A public safety dispatcher receives and dispatches emergency calls from the public. A dispatcher may work for local, state or federal government agencies, hospitals or independent emergency centers. The dispatcher is the first point of contact whose primary responsibility is to initiate the appropriate response.

The Public Safety Dispatchers' Basic Course is the entry-level training requirement for dispatchers employed by agencies participating in POST's public safety dispatcher program. The Public Safety Dispatchers' Basic Course has a minimum hourly requirement of 120 hours, which is divided into 14 individual topics, called Learning Domains. The Learning Domains contain the minimum required foundational information for given subjects, which are detailed in the publication entitled Training Specifications for the Public Safety Dispatchers' Basic Course. A copy of the publication is available on POST's website.

(<http://lib.post.ca.gov/Publications/DispatcherTrainingSpecsOnlineformat.pdf>.)

The publication indicates that public safety dispatchers currently receive training in “Techniques to effectively communicate with a person who is ... mentally incapacitated” (*Id.* at 104-2.), and also they receive training in dispatcher responsibilities and requirements of gathering “Information needed to assist initial response action,” which includes “Mental, emotional, medical, or physical condition.” (*Id.* at 105-2.) However, there are no specifications as to what this training entails.

### 3. Argument in Support

According to the California Hospital Association:

Peace officers rely on information provided from a dispatcher. With proper training on identifying mental disorders or navigating conversations with someone dealing with a behavioral health issue, dispatchers can help reduce or prevent volatile interactions. This bill is a necessary step to promoting informed interactions between peace officers and those they seek to help.

At least 20 percent of incarcerated adults have a recent history of mental illness and large percentage of Californians go untreated. If officers are properly informed, they can tailor how they engage, potentially diverting the person away from county jail and into an inpatient or outpatient facility where they can receive proper care. Improved dispatch information will improve the safety for everyone — the individual in crisis, the emergency responder, family members, and bystanders.

For these reasons, CHA respectfully asks for your “AYE” vote on AB 680.

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