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Cornyn, Whitehouse Introduce Law Enforcement De-escalation Training Bill

Legislation Would Support Training for Law Enforcement Officers to Safely and Effectively Respond to People in Crisis

WASHINGTON – Today U.S. Senators John Cornyn (R-TX) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) introduced the *Law Enforcement De-escalation Training Act* to equip law enforcement officers with the tools to effectively and safely respond to people in crisis. The bill would build off the existing Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant program to create a dedicated stream of funding to local and state law enforcement agencies to train their officers and the mental health professionals who work with them in de-escalation tactics, alternatives to use of force, safely responding to mental, behavioral, and suicidal crises, successfully participating on a crisis intervention team, and making referrals to community-based mental and behavioral health services and support and other social programs.

“We ask law enforcement in our communities to wear too many hats, including that of mental health provider, and they often do not have enough resources or training to provide the level of care individuals in crisis need,” said Sen. Cornyn. **“We must give them the necessary tools so officers feel supported while helping those experiencing mental health emergencies and other crises, and this legislation would do just that.”**

“Too often, police respond when someone is suffering a mental health or behavioral health issue, yet lack the resources they need to do so effectively. We can save lives by equipping officers to recognize and respond appropriately to those situations, to work with mental health professionals, and connect people to treatment,” said Sen. Whitehouse. **“I’m pleased to join with Senator Cornyn on this important bill.”**

Senators Bill Cassidy, M.D. (R-LA), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Tim Scott (R-SC), Chris Coons (D-DE), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) joined as original cosponsors of the bill, which would empower police and the mental health professionals working with them to link individuals to mental and behavioral health services in their community.

Background:

Police are often on the front lines of behavioral and mental health and substance use crises. Studies estimate that as many as six to 10 percent of law enforcement encounters involve persons experiencing serious mental illnesses. Currently, people in crisis account for between 25-50 percent of fatalities during law enforcement encounters. Navigating an encounter with a person experiencing serious mental illness or substance use is challenging, but there are solutions that can protect the safety of people in crisis, law enforcement officers, and bystanders. Training in de-escalation tactics and other techniques can reduce excessive force complaints and fatalities during law enforcement encounters, and crisis intervention teams can improve outcomes. Law enforcement agencies across the country are seeking resources to conduct trainings in these techniques and practices.

The bipartisan *Law Enforcement De-escalation Training Act* would:

- Require the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services to develop curricula in the training topics, or identifying existing curricula, in consultation with law enforcement, mental health organizations, family advocacy organizations, and civil liberties groups, among other stakeholders;
- Authorize \$70 million in annual grant funding for training, including scenario-based exercises and evaluative assessments;
- And require the National Institute of Justice and the Government Accountability Office to evaluate the implementation of the program and the effect of the training, to ensure that the curricula have a tangible impact on law enforcement encounters with people in crisis, and identify possible changes that would further improve outcomes.

The bill is endorsed by the Fraternal Order of Police, Major County Sheriffs of America, Major Cities Chiefs Association, National Criminal Justice Association, National Association of Police Organizations, National Sheriffs' Association, National Association of Counties, American Psychological Association, National Alliance on Mental Illness, American Counseling Association, National Register of Health Service Psychologists, American Association of Suicidology, College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists, American Association on Health and Disability, Lakeshore Foundation, Anxiety and Depression Association of America, American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work, Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors, National Association for Rural Mental Health, National Federation of Families, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies, and the Niskanen Center.