

SENATE LAW AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 133

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: FEBRUARY 22, 1996

The Senate Law and Public Safety Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 133 with committee amendments.

This bill directs the Commissioner of Personnel to establish a 24-hour "Law Enforcement Officer Crisis Intervention Services" telephone hotline. The hotline would receive and respond to calls from law enforcement officers who have been involved in any event or incident which has produced personal or job-related depression, anxiety, stress, or other psychological or emotional tension, trauma, pressure, or disorder for the officer. The hotline operators are to seek to identify those officers who should be referred to further debriefing and counseling services, and to provide such referrals.

In order to ensure the law enforcement community of the confidential nature and the integrity of the program, the bill requires the Commissioner of Personnel to establish the hotline. Having the Commissioner of Personnel rather than a law enforcement agency in charge will ensure that the names of the callers and the information exchanged will not be revealed to an officer's superiors or employer. The bill does permit the commissioner to establish guidelines to provide for the tracking of an officer who exhibits such a severe emotional or psychological disorder or condition that the operator taking the call reasonably believes might result in harm to the officer or to others.

In establishing the hotline, the commissioner would consult with representatives from the New Jersey Association of Chiefs of Police, the New Jersey State Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, the Fraternal Order of Police, and other parties who can contribute to the development and operation of an effective program.

The bill also directs the commissioner to prepare a list of licensed or certified psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers; qualified counselors; and experienced former law enforcement officers who are willing to participate in the program and provide debriefing and counseling services.

The hotline would be funded by proceeds the Attorney General receives from the disposal of property forfeited by criminals.

Law enforcement is an extremely difficult and stressful occupation.

Officers are constantly involved in events and incidents that can cause great emotional and psychological pressures which, in turn, can have an adverse effect on their personal and professional lives. As an occupational group, law enforcement officers have an uncommonly high incidence of suicide, marital and family problems, alcohol and substance abuse, and other stress related disorders.

The committee amended the bill to provide that the Commissioner of Personnel establish the hotline. As introduced, the bill required the Commissioner of Human Services to establish the hotline.

This bill was prefiled for introduction in the 1996 session pending technical review. As reported, the bill includes the changes required by technical review which has been performed.