

SENATE LAW AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 134

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: FEBRUARY 22, 1996

The Senate Law and Public Safety Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 134.

This bill permits counties to establish crisis intervention service programs to provide post traumatic debriefing and counseling services for law enforcement officers who have been involved in incidents which may produce personal or job-related depression, anxiety, stress or other psychological or emotional tensions, traumas, pressures, or disorders.

Under the provisions of this bill, a county could establish a crisis intervention program for the law enforcement officers working in the county. To preserve the integrity of the program and to encourage law enforcement officers to take advantage of the program's services, the bill requires that the program be organized as an independent agency of county government, rather than organized as a part of any county or municipal law enforcement agency or department. For the same reasons, the bill provides that all the employees of the program must be county employees or contractors rather than employees of any law enforcement agency and that the actual facility must not be located in or adjacent to any law enforcement facility, station or barracks.

While the debriefing and counseling services would be available to any law enforcement officer, the bill requires that any officer who is involved in a critical incident must participate in the program before returning to active duty. A critical incident is defined as an event involving a shooting; an untimely death; injury to or the death of a juvenile; a terrorist act; a hostage situation; injury to or the death of an associate law enforcement officer; personal wound or injury; or other emotional or psychologically stressful event.

The services are to be provided by properly licensed or certified psychologists and social workers. Again, to ensure the integrity of the program and protect the participating officers, the bill prohibits the use of law enforcement officers in the debriefing and counseling services part of the program, but does encourage each county or municipal department to conduct its own debriefing and counseling services to help identify those needing the county services and refer them to those services.

To provide advisory assistance in organizing a crisis intervention program, the bill directs the governing body to establish a county crisis

intervention services advisory council. The council would include a representative of the county Association of Chiefs of Police; a representative from the union or unions, as the case may be, representing the law enforcement officers; the County Prosecutor or his designee; a representative of the county Department of Health specializing in mental health; a certified or licensed psychologist experienced in the diagnosis and treatment of emotional, psychological or post traumatic stress disorders, and any other specialists the governing body thinks appropriate.

Finally, the bill amends R.S.39:5-41 to impose an additional \$1 fee on every motor vehicle fine or penalty assessed and collected in a county that establishes a law enforcement crisis intervention services programs. The monies collected are to be deposited in a special county fund and utilized to defray the costs of the crisis intervention services program.

Law enforcement is one of the most difficult and stressful occupations. 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 classification, law enforcement officers have an uncommonly high incidence of suicide, marital and family problems, alcohol and substance abuse, and other stress related disorders.

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