

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

C.S.H.B. 3528  
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Committee Report (Substituted)

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

The International Association of Fire Fighters states that eight percent of current and retired professional firefighters have had suicidal thoughts and, according to the CDC, firefighters are more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty. Though post-traumatic stress disorder is a compensable illness under workers' compensation in Texas for firefighters and police officers, connecting firefighters to appropriate mental health treatment options has been difficult. Peer support programs are often used to help identify mental illness in the fire service, but in their current state they are ineffective in most circumstances and are not staffed by licensed medical professionals. C.S.H.B. 3528 seeks to address this issue by establishing a study group to advise the legislature on future legislation regarding suicide prevention and peer support for firefighters.

### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT**

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

It is the committee's opinion that rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Commission on Fire Protection in SECTION 2 of this bill.

### **ANALYSIS**

C.S.H.B. 3528 requires the Texas Commission on Fire Protection (TCFP) to establish an advisory committee to study the need to implement suicide prevention and peer support programs in Texas fire departments. The bill sets out the composition of the eleven-member committee as follows:

- two fire fighters and one licensed provider of mental health services, appointed by the Texas State Association of Firefighters;
- two fire fighters and a one licensed provider of mental health services, appointed by the State Firefighters' and Fire Marshals' Association of Texas;
- two fire chiefs and one licensed provider of mental health services, appointed by the Texas Fire Chiefs Association;
- one person, appointed by the executive director of the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service; and
- the executive director of TCFP.

With respect to the administration of the committee, the bill does the following:

- requires the committee to designate a committee member as chair;
- authorizes TCFP to adopt rules to carry out the committee's purpose and duties;
- requires TCFP to provide administrative support and resources necessary for the committee to do so; and

- authorizes the committee to meet in person or by telephone conference, videoconference, or other electronic means.

C.S.H.B. 3528 requires the advisory committee, not later than September 1, 2024, to prepare and submit a report to the governor and the legislature. The report must do the following:

- provide an overview of suicide prevention and peer support groups in fire departments;
- address possible licensing requirements and any confidentiality concerns; and
- provide recommendations on:
  - the need for legislation to implement suicide prevention and peer support groups in fire departments;
  - whether to encourage local governments to develop such groups in fire departments; and
  - specific programs to be implemented in Texas.

The advisory committee is abolished and the bill's provisions expire January 10, 2025.

### **EFFECTIVE DATE**

September 1, 2023.

### **COMPARISON OF INTRODUCED AND SUBSTITUTE**

While C.S.H.B. 3528 may differ from the introduced in minor or nonsubstantive ways, the following summarizes the substantial differences between the introduced and committee substitute versions of the bill.

The substitute includes provisions not in the introduced that expand the composition of the committee to include two fire fighters and one licensed mental health provider appointed by the State Firefighters' and Fire Marshals' Association of Texas and one person appointed by the executive of the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service.