

By: Morales Shaw

H.B. No. 281

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to disaster behavioral health coordination and response.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Chapter 531, Government Code, is amended by adding Subchapter Z to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER Z. DISASTER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COORDINATION

Sec. 531.901. DISASTER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COORDINATION. (a)

The Health and Human Services Commission shall designate existing staff to coordinate statewide disaster behavioral health preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.

(b) The designated coordination staff shall:

(1) coordinate with the Texas Division of Emergency Management on disaster behavioral health activities;

(2) manage federal crisis counseling assistance and training program applications and grants;

(3) maintain a registry of qualified disaster behavioral health personnel; and

(4) provide technical assistance to local mental health authorities for disaster preparedness.

Sec. 531.902. DISASTER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH DEPLOYMENT. (a)

The commission shall coordinate with local mental health authorities to deploy behavioral health services to disaster-affected areas.

(b) Deployment coordination shall be activated:

1           (1) within 72 hours of a gubernatorial disaster  
2 declaration;  
3           (2) upon request from local emergency management  
4 officials; or  
5           (3) following federal disaster declarations affecting  
6 Texas communities.

7           (c) Disaster behavioral health services shall include:

8           (1) crisis counseling and psychological first aid;  
9           (2) referral services to ongoing mental health care;  
10 and  
11           (3) support for vulnerable populations including  
12 children, elderly, and individuals with disabilities.

13           Sec. 531.903. LOCAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PREPAREDNESS. (a)  
14 Each local mental health authority shall:

15           (1) include disaster behavioral health components in  
16 existing emergency plans;  
17           (2) maintain contact information for disaster  
18 behavioral health personnel; and  
19           (3) pre-identify vulnerable populations requiring  
20 specialized behavioral health support.

21           (b) Local plans must address the needs of:

22           (1) children and adolescents;  
23           (2) elderly adults;  
24           (3) individuals with serious mental illness; and  
25           (4) first responders and emergency personnel.

26           Sec. 531.904. CRISIS COUNSELING ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING  
27 PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION. (a) The commission shall serve as the

state administrative agency for federal Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program grants.

(b) Following a federal disaster declaration, the commission shall:

(1) submit immediate services program applications to the Federal Emergency Management Agency within 14 days;

(2) coordinate with affected local mental health authorities on service delivery plans;

(3) ensure cultural and linguistic competency in service provision; and

(4) establish performance metrics and reporting requirements.

(c) Crisis counseling services must:

(1) be provided at no cost to disaster survivors;

(2) focus on normal reactions to abnormal events;

(3) emphasize resilience and recovery rather than pathology; and

(4) include outreach to underserved and hard-to-reach communities.

Sec. 531.905. DISASTER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PERSONNEL REGISTRY. (a) The commission shall maintain a registry of disaster behavioral health personnel available for disaster response.

(b) The registry shall include:

(1) professional qualifications and certifications;

(2) disaster response training completion; and

(3) geographic availability.

(c) Personnel in the registry must complete Substance Abuse

and Mental Health Services Administration Psychological First Aid training or equivalent disaster behavioral health training approved by the commission.

SECTION 4. Chapter 418, Government Code, is amended by adding Section 418.110 to read as follows:

Sec. 418.110. COORDINATION WITH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES. (a) The Texas Division of Emergency Management and the Health and Human Services Commission shall jointly develop:

(1) integrated disaster response protocols including behavioral health components;

(2) communication systems for coordinating behavioral health deployments;

(3) training programs for emergency management personnel on behavioral health needs; and

(4) performance metrics for disaster behavioral health response effectiveness.

(b) During disaster declarations:

(1) the division shall immediately notify the Health and Human Services Commission of potential behavioral health service needs;

(2) the commission shall deploy assessment teams within 24 hours of notification;

(3) both agencies shall participate in unified command structures when appropriate; and

(4) joint situation reports shall include behavioral health impact assessments.

SECTION 5. Not later than March 1, 2026, the Health and

1 Human Services Commission shall:

2 (1) designate coordination staff as required by  
3 Section 531.901, Government Code, as added by this Act;

4 (2) establish the disaster behavioral health  
5 personnel registry required by Section 531.905, Government Code, as  
6 added by this Act; and

7 (3) adopt initial rules necessary to implement  
8 Subchapter Z, Chapter 531, Government Code, as added by this Act.

9 SECTION 6. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives  
10 a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as  
11 provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this  
12 Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this  
13 Act takes effect on the 91st day after the last day of the  
14 legislative session.