
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 6719

AN ACT CONCERNING EMERGENCY SERVICES AND INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER, COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS AND NONVERBAL LEARNING DISORDERS.

SUMMARY

This bill makes several changes concerning interactions between emergency services personnel and children and adults with autism spectrum disorder, cognitive impairments, and nonverbal learning disorders. Under the bill, “emergency services” means law enforcement, firefighting, medical, ambulance, and other emergency services.

Specifically, the bill requires the departments of Children and Families (DCF), Developmental Services (DDS), and Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) to jointly develop and publish guidelines and best practices for municipalities for creating and implementing emergency services awareness programming.

It also requires DESPP, in consultation with DDS, DCF, and at least one organization that advocates for people with autism spectrum disorder, to develop and assemble sensory kits for use by emergency services personnel. It allows municipalities that implement the awareness programming to apply to DESPP on or before September 1, 2025, to receive the sensory kits.

Additionally, the bill allows the parent or guardian of a person with any of the disorders listed earlier to submit a form to a municipal police department with information about the person. The municipal police department must enter this information into a searchable database, which 9-1-1 emergency dispatchers must use, when practicable, when dispatching emergency services to a residential address.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

EMERGENCY SERVICES AWARENESS PROGRAM

Guidelines and Best Practices

The bill requires DCF, DDS, and DESPP to (1) jointly develop guidelines and best practices for municipalities by December 31, 2023, and (2) publish the guidelines and best practices on their websites by January 1, 2024.

Under the bill, the programming must include opportunities for children and adults with autism spectrum disorder, cognitive impairments, and nonverbal learning disorders to observe and interact, in a setting that is suited to their developmental and sensory needs, with (1) uniformed emergency services personnel and the vehicles they use, (2) flashing lights and sirens associated with the vehicles, and (3) mock traffic stops.

Sensory Kits

By January 1, 2024, the bill requires DESPP, in consultation with DCF, DDS, and at least one organization that advocates for people with autism spectrum disorder to develop and assemble sensory kits to be used by emergency personnel who, in doing their duties, interact with people with these disorders. The sensory kits must (1) help people manage emotions and anxiety during emergencies and in interactions with the emergency services personnel and (2) include noise-canceling headphones, dark tinted glasses, and tactile objects or toys used to reduce anxiety.

By September 1, 2025, any municipality that created and implemented emergency services awareness programming following the published guidelines and best practices may apply to DESPP, as the department prescribes, to receive sensory kits. The bill requires DESPP to give the municipality three sensory kits per 10,000 residents.

INTERACTIONS WITH EMERGENCY SERVICES PERSONNEL

DESPP Form

The bill requires DESPP, by December 31, 2023, to develop a form for municipal police departments to distribute to parents and guardians of people with autism spectrum disorder, cognitive impairments, and

nonverbal learning disorders.

The form must record information that may help emergency services personnel in their interactions with the above people, including the following:

1. the person's name, nickname, date of birth, sex, height, weight, eye color, hair color, and address and any scars or identifying marks;
2. the name and telephone number of a person who may be contacted in an emergency pertaining to the person;
3. the person's language and communication skills, including, whether the person (a) is verbal or nonverbal; (b) speaks American Sign Language; and (c) can read or write, communicate by pointing to pictures, repeat questions or respond "yes" or "no" to questions;
4. whether the person is sensitive to noise, touch, light, crowds, or other stimuli;
5. conditions, circumstances, or items the person dislikes or avoids, including eye contact, being wet or dirty, interacting with strangers, and certain clothing or shoes;
6. atypical behaviors the person exhibits, including speaking loudly, self-injury, running if chased, vocal stimming (i.e., making sounds with one's mouth, lips, or vocal chords to self-soothe), making high-pitched noises, disregarding or having no sense of danger, and sensory seeking;
7. pertinent medical information, including whether the person is hearing or visually impaired or has a seizure disorder, motor or vocal tics, or a high pain tolerance; and
8. methods the personnel may use to calm the person, including using a calm and quiet voice or noise-canceling headphones, giving the person time alone or specific food items, and asking

the person how the personnel can help him or her.

Form Availability and Submission

The bill requires DESPP to publish the form on the department's website by January 1, 2024. Each municipal police department must make copies of the form available in a publicly accessible area of the department starting January 15, 2024.

The bill allows the parent or guardian of any person with autism spectrum disorder, a cognitive impairment, or nonverbal learning disorder to complete the DESPP form and return it to the municipal police department in the municipality where the person with the above condition lives.

Electronic Database

Upon receiving the form, the municipal police department must record the information provided in a searchable electronic database the department maintains and make it available to:

1. each police officer the department employs for purposes of determining whether a person with autism spectrum disorder, a cognitive impairment, or nonverbal learning disorder resides where the officer is responding and
2. the municipality's public safety answering point (9-1-1 emergency service).

9-1-1 Emergency Dispatchers

By January 15, 2024, the bill requires each 9-1-1 emergency dispatcher to, when practicable, search the electronic database described above when dispatching law enforcement, firefighting, medical, ambulance, or other emergency services to a residential address. The dispatcher must do so to (1) determine whether someone with autism spectrum disorder, a cognitive impairment, or nonverbal learning disorder resides at the address, and (2) communicate information about the person to the responding emergency services personnel.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Committee on Children

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 19 Nay 0 (03/03/2023)