

ASSEMBLY LAW AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 5514

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 5, 2023

The Assembly Law and Public Safety Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 5514.

As reported by the committee, Assembly Bill No. 5514 establishes the Firefighter Critical Mental Health Assistance Grant Program.

Due to the nature of firefighting, with its associated risks, danger, and stress, firefighters face a high probability of developing post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental illnesses. Firefighters commonly feel that disclosure of mental illness will result in negative professional consequences up to and including job loss, creating a culture in which firefighters often do not divulge mental health struggles and do not seek appropriate and necessary treatment. Family members of firefighters often face unique stressors related to their loved ones' employment and may have an elevated need for mental health services.

To address these concerns, the bill establishes the Firefighter Critical Mental Health Assistance Grant Program in the Department of Human Services. The purpose of the program is to award grants to mental health providers to provide confidential mental health services to firefighters and members of their immediate families who are in a mental health crisis or suicidal.

Under the bill, the Commissioner of Human Services is required to develop an application by which a mental health services provider may apply for a grant for funding to provide mental health services pursuant to the provisions of the bill. The commissioner is required to establish selection criteria for the awarding of grants under the program. The bill provides that consideration is to be given, to the greatest extent possible, to the geographical location of mental health providers and the areas where they provide services in order to facilitate patients traveling less than one hour to receive mental health services.

Under the bill, the commissioner is to provide notice of the availability of funding for this program and make the application available on the department's Internet website. Upon receipt of an application, the commissioner is required to review the application and, subject to the availability of funds, award a grant to each approved grant applicant. Additionally, under the bill, the commissioner is required to publish a list of approved mental health providers on the department's Internet website.