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AB 1795 – Expanding Access to Community Paramedicine

PURPOSE

This bill seeks to give local agencies the authority to develop Community Paramedicine programs that allow patients with mental health and alcohol intoxication needs to have more direct access to appropriate care and increase efficiency for local emergency response systems.

BACKGROUND

Currently, patients with a mental health condition who are under the care of a paramedic must be transported to a hospital with an emergency department. In 2016, emergency departments statewide received over 14.5 million visits, resulting in severe overcrowding and high wait times.

Often, a patient who is transported to an emergency department could be treated more appropriately if transported directly to a mental health urgent care center or to a sobering center where medically-trained personnel, including nurses and psychiatrists, can provide specialized intensive crisis services and treatment. These highly-trained personnel can connect recovering patients to supportive services that will lead toward long-term care, housing, and self-sufficiency. Emergency department staff is ill-equipped to provide services for inebriated patients or those in need of mental health care whose condition is deemed to be non-emergent.

Community Paramedicine is a model of community-based healthcare designed to provide efficient emergency response services. It allows paramedics to function outside their traditional emergency response and transport roles to help facilitate more appropriate use of emergency department resources while enhancing access to care. For example, fire departments in Los Angeles County respond to over 650,000 9-1-1 calls annually and transport over 550,000 of those patients to emergency departments. A third of this number is estimated to be non-emergent and over 30,000 of these patients who could be more appropriately cared for at a mental health urgent care center or sobering center.

Community Paramedicine is successfully operating in several states, 7 of which use sobering centers to deliver care to patients with isolated inebriation and 3 of which have implemented behavioral health redirection programs.

EXISTING LAW

Current law requires paramedics responding to emergency 9-1-1 calls to transport all patients who show signs of mental health problems or inebriation to hospital emergency departments.

The Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development approved the launch of the *Health Workforce Pilot Project, No. 173 – Community Paramedicine Approval with Modifications*, which included a directive to test, demonstrate, and evaluate the practice of Community Paramedicine in the area of transporting patients with specified conditions to alternate locations other than an acute care emergency department. Evaluations of the pilot project find the programs to have improved coordination amongst health systems and reduced ambulance transports and emergency department use, without resulting in any negative outcomes for patients.

Existing law also allows law enforcement officers to direct a person to a mental health urgent care center or sobering facility unilaterally.

SUMMARY

AB 1795 would authorize a local emergency medical services agency to allow paramedics to transport people to a community care facility, defined as a mental health urgent care center or sobering facility, if available in their county. This bill also authorizes local medical services agencies to add to its scope of practice activities necessary for the assessment, treatment, and transport of a patient to a community care facility upon receiving approval from the State Emergency Medical Services Authority.

SUPPORT

Los Angeles County (co-sponsor)
California Hospital Association (co-sponsor)
ACLU of California
California Ambulance Association
California Contract Cities Association
California Emergency Nurses Association
California Fire Chiefs Association Board of Directors
California State Association of Counties
City of Bellflower
Emergency Medical Directors Association of California
Emergency Medical Services Administrators Association of California
Exodus Recovery, Inc.
Gateway Cities Council of Governments
Los Angeles District Attorney's Office
Los Angeles Fire Department
National Sobering Collaborative
San Francisco Department of Public Health
San Francisco Fire Department
San Joaquin County Health Care Services Agency
South Bay Association of Chambers of Commerce
Stanislaus County

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