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# ERIK SEVERSON

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 28<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## **Testimony on Assembly Bill 450 Assembly Committee on Health**

**October 22, 2013**

I would like to thank the members of the committee for attending this hearing on Assembly Bill 450. I would also like to thank Sen. Vukmir for her leadership on this important issue.

Based on the recommendations of the Speaker's Task Force on Mental Health, we have introduced Assembly Bill 450, which requires the Department of Health Services to award grants for mental health crisis intervention team training for law enforcement agencies and correctional officers.

Several individuals provided testimony to the Task Force in support of expanded crisis intervention teams (CIT's). CIT's are comprised of law enforcement officers who are specially trained in responding to individuals with mental health diagnosis. One CIT model, the Memphis Model, provides a 40-hour course for law enforcement to inform officers about mental illness, recognize symptoms, and utilize non-violent de-escalation techniques to reduce the possibility for harm to the individual, the officer, and the community.

Given the prevalence of mental health diagnosis among incarcerated individuals, the Task Force recommended providing training for law enforcement officers, as well as correctional officers. In Wisconsin, several counties have already implemented CIT, including Milwaukee, Brown, Winnebago, and Racine.

Thank you again Committee Members for taking the time to attend this public hearing and I look forward to working with you on passage of this legislation.



# LEAH VUKMIR

STATE SENATOR

October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013

Mr. Chairman, Committee members, I would like to thank you for giving Assembly Bill 450 a Public Hearing this afternoon. This legislation seeks to address one of the most pressing issues covered by the Speaker's Task Force on Mental Health; the training provided to law enforcement and correctional officers with respect to Crisis Intervention with individuals with a suspected mental health diagnosis. AB450 will help give law enforcement and correctional officers the tools they need by directing grants toward CIT or "crisis intervention team training" that involve a 40 hour course designed to provide necessary information to law enforcement and correctional officers about mental illness and enable them to more effectively respond in crisis situations.

Specifically, Assembly Bill 450 directs the Department of Health Services "to award grants for mental health crisis intervention team training for law enforcement and correctional officers [with] . . . [t]he total amount . . . to be awarded in each fiscal biennium . . . \$250,000." As testimony during the Speaker's Task Force indicated, these grants provided through AB 450 build upon the positive outcomes as a result of better relations between law enforcement and the mental health community. Moreover, testimony also illustrated the high value of having trained law enforcement and correctional officers specially trained with the unique ability to respond in those situations involving mental health issues by employing non-violent de-escalation techniques in order to minimize the potential harm to the law enforcement officer, the individual or general public.

Assembly Bill 450 draws upon "best-practice" methods that will allow trained law enforcement and correctional officers to utilize techniques at the early stages of a potential situation that may help avoid a dangerous conflict or the resulting criminal conduct that often follows. Any situation that requires the response of law enforcement always carries with it the potential for harm, but by having trained personnel familiar with mental illnesses available in those crucial early moments, I am confident we can decrease the risk of, and ultimately minimize the potential trauma for all involved. Furthermore, I firmly believe that having law enforcement and correctional officers properly trained in these sensitive protocols will allow for alternative options to be considered, due in large part, because an escalating situation can often be avoided.

Assembly Bill 450 is common sense legislation that will better equip law enforcement and correctional officers with the knowledge & tools to better handle those situations that require sensitivity and proper temperament, and I urge its passage.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Committee members for considering AB 450 this afternoon.