

To: Senate Health and Welfare

From: Kristin J. Chandler, J.D.

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Re: Mental Health Training for EMTs in Vermont

Date: February 6, 2024

I listened with interest during your first read through of S.189 three weeks ago. I heard Senator Lyons indicate the impetus for this bill were more than one situation in the Northeast Kingdom where EMTs did not know how to respond to a mental health crisis, or how to de-escalate. I am not sure that protocols are the solution to this; to me, it is training.

In Team Two training, which is offered in 5 different regions across the state, EMTs are invited to attend. Every single time an EMT has attended the training, they remark at how mental health training is not available to them; this is the first real mental health training they have had. A few have attended more than once, as they do not receive mental health training anywhere else.

So many EMTs are volunteers in Vermont, it is hard to get them to an all day training. Even though Team Two training is free, it often means an EMT is taking a day off from their “real job”. In 2017, I was able to offer Team Two training at the state EMS conference in Burlington. 4 EMTs attended.

Since Team Two began inviting EMT’s to the training in 2016, 28 EMTs have been trained. That is an average of just under 5 EMTs in Vermont receive Team Two training every year.

Last year I was hired to train a new class of over 30 EMTs. We set up a 3 hour zoom training with a plan to follow it up with an 8 hour Saturday clinic, where we would run through scenarios. That additional 8 hours never happened. There was an exam to prepare the students for and they had to use their time for that.

EMTS have an enormous amount of protocols they update every 2 years. I pull out the protocols that apply to a mental health call and include them in the materials distributed at every Team Two training. There's a protocol for responding to a suicidal person, separate ones for adults and children in an "altered mental status" and a protocol for using restraints. 117 protocols overall; 4 that might apply to a person in crisis.

CIT training – Crisis Intervention Team training has been offered this past year in Washington County through a grant awarded the Montpelier police department from the Department of Public Safety. 4 EMTs have been through the training. Team Two was a pre-requisite for them. So 4 EMTs in the state of Vermont have received 40 hours of mental health crisis response training.

There needs to be resources available for EMTs to receive more mental health training.