

Assembly Bill 501

MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS RESIDENTIAL CARE FOR YOUTH

INTRODUCTION DATE FEBRUARY 13TH

Assemblyman Sebastian Ridley-Thomas 54th District

SUMMARY

AB 501 expands the definition of Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program, thereby creating a category of Department of Social Services (DSS) licensing in state statute for children's mental health crisis residential services. The bill would require such programs that plan to serve Medi-Cal beneficiaries to be certified to provide Medi-Cal specialty mental health services by the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) or by a county Mental Health Plan under contract to DHCS.

BACKGROUND

Currently, an estimated 3 out of every 4 children in the U.S. that need mental health services do not receive them. Nearly 20 percent of high school students in California consider suicide at some point in their lives and more than 10 percent actually attempt it. With 47 out of 58 counties lacking any child/adolescent psychiatric hospital inpatient beds for children under 12 (and fewer than 70 beds statewide) the need for children's mental health crisis residential services could not be more acute.

Guided by the federal Olmstead Act, mental health treatment is to be provided in the least restrictive setting possible. Federal law requires Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) services for every individual under 21 years of age who is covered under Medicaid (i.e., Medi-Cal in California). The Medi-Cal program provides EPSDT specialty mental health services through county Mental Health Plans under contract with the Department of Health Care Services.

Federal law requires that the EPSDT benefit include an array of mental health screenings and services whether or not the services are covered under the State Medicaid Plan. Among the benefits already included in the State Mental Health Plan are: EPSDT supplemental Specialty Mental Health Services; crisis intervention; crisis stabilization; and crisis residential treatment services. (CCR, title 9, chapter 11, section 1810.247).

EXISTING LAW

Currently, there is no licensing category however specific to children's crisis residential services. As a result, this critically needed service – in lieu of

inpatient psychiatric care – is missing from the continuum of care.

Here is an example of the current system. A 9-year-old child is experiencing increased behavioral and emotional symptoms which include persistent suicidal and homicidal thoughts. Outpatient services available within the family's county are not able to meet the child's increased needs. The only immediately available intervention is psychiatric hospitalization. The child experiences six hospital stays in three weeks, all at facilities at least 3-5 hours away from home. When the client returns home, the lack of crisis services increases the risk of a yet another hospitalization.

THIS BILL

AB 501 would add a sub-category of licensing under Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP), thereby creating a licensing category in state statute for children's mental health crisis residential services. These services could be accessed through private health care plans, Medi-Cal managed care plans, and county Mental Health Plans.

The bill would require such programs that plan to serve Medi-Cal beneficiaries to be certified to provide Medi-Cal specialty mental health services by the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) or by a county Mental Health Plan under contract to DHCS.

With the appropriate licensing category established, the state and counties would have all the elements of the continuum available to implement the services under the EPSDT requirements already in place.

SUPPORT

- California Alliance (Sponsor)
- East Bay Children's Law Office
- California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies
- John Burton Advocates for Youth
- SENECA Family of Agencies

- California Mental Health Advocates for Children and Youth (CMHACY)
- Uplift Family Services
- Crittenton
- Redwood Community Services
- Sunny Hills Services
- Casa Pacifica Centers for Children and Families
- Fred Finch Youth Centers
- Redwood Quality Management Company
- Norcal MHA
- Steinberg Institute
- Statewide Taskforce on Accessing Health Services for California Children in Foster Care
- Young Minds Advocacy
- Sierra Vista Child and Family Services
- HillSides
- Junior Blind of America
- Families Now

