

# EQUITY FOR ALL KIDS



To: The Judicial Proceedings Committee  
From: Rachel White, JD, Child Welfare Policy Director  
Re: SB 454: Public Safety-Mandatory Mental Health Training- First Responders and Law Enforcement  
Date: February 13, 2020  
Position: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB454-Public Safety-Mandatory Mental Health Training- First Responders and Law Enforcement. Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) supports this bill as it will help equip first responders with the skills necessary to appropriately interact with those who are battling mental illness.

ACY works to improve the lives of all kids but especially our most vulnerable populations to include youth who are affected by mental illness and have a higher probability to interact with the police and other first responders. As a result, it is imperative that first responders are required to complete mental health awareness training for a variety of reasons.

Stigma has been a major barrier between police and those who might display signs of a mental health condition. Each, he says, tended to view the other as a potential threat, with many officers leery of the unknown while individuals with mental health issues might fear being jailed over misunderstood behavior. It is imperative that trusts is developed between the community and first responders that is rooted in dignity and compassion.

To protect the lives of our challenged youth when interacting with first responders, it is imperative that the training addresses combating the stigma associated with mental illness, connect individuals to mental health services, employ crisis de-escalation techniques, and enable early interventions by recognizing the signs and symptoms of mental illness to prevent unnecessary harm.

The bill works to advance the safety of individuals affected by mental health crisis and first responders and for the reasons stated above, we ask that you issue a favorable report on SB 454.

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