

Legislation introduced as result of Speaker's mental health task force

Legislation has been introduced as a result of a report released in January by the House C.A.R.E.S. Task Force, a bipartisan group of legislators appointed by Speaker Tom Leonard to investigate the needs of Michigan's broken mental health system.

"The simple truth is Michigan's mental health system is in need of a serious overhaul," Leonard said. "I am grateful to the work my colleagues put into this project over the past year, and I am encouraged by the important reforms they are already putting together."

The task force was named for its mission – to improve Community, Access, Resources, Education and Safety for the state's mental health community. The group of legislators traveled the state listening to panels consisting of people impacted by mental health services and toured health care and criminal justice facilities. The House also launched an online initiative, which allowed the people of Michigan to share their concerns about mental health care with the task force.

Reps. Klint Kesto, of Commerce Township, and Hank Vaupel, of Fowlerville, who co-chaired the task force, have both introduced legislation inspired by their findings.

"I am very optimistic about the future of our mental health system once these changes are implemented," Kesto said. "It's long overdue that we better care for our state's most vulnerable people."

The first bills introduced thus far are:

- **House Bills 5450-52 (Reps. Kesto, Jeff Noble and Curt VanderWall)** combat the growing shortage of mental health care professionals by expanding Michigan's talent

pool. The bills allow for employment of professionals previously convicted of certain minor felonies and misdemeanors. Those convicted of serious crimes will still be excluded from consideration. Kesto says it's time to make use of the many qualified individuals who are currently being excluded because of past mistakes unrelated to their ability to care for patients.

- [HB 5085](#) (**Rep. Steve Marino**) helps local agencies fight substance abuse in Michigan by dedicating a portion of the revenues raised through state liquor taxes to local community mental health agencies. Funding could provide more than \$17 million annually to combat addiction.
- **HBs 5460-61 (Reps. Vaupel and Patrick Green)** require drug overdose training for peace officers, medical first responders and paramedics to combat the exponential growth in instances of opioid overdose. In 2014, [568 people in Michigan died from complications related to opioid overdose](#) – a 911-percent increase since 1999, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.
- [HB 5439](#) (**Rep. Mary Whiteford**) ensures availability of psychiatric beds for patients experiencing a mental health crisis. A new state database will include the number and location of available beds at health care facilities throughout the state. The bill aims to care for patients efficiently and effectively.
- **HBs 5243-5246 (Rep. Kesto)** require clinicians to complete parole psychological evaluations within 45 days of the parole board's request. This ensures parole decisions are not unnecessarily delayed. The same requirement will be made for completion of court-ordered mental competency evaluations so that individuals may stand trial within a

reasonable time. Clinicians will be able to get a 15-day maximum extension on mental competency reports to ensure the report is done accurately and completely.

“This is just the beginning,” Vaupel said. “There’s a lot more to come. Each and every measure we introduce continues to be directly inspired by the stories and suggestions of real people who shared their stories with us.”

The task force’s report is available to the public at www.House.MI.gov/CARES.

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