

SENATE, No. 1810

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 24, 2020

Sponsored by:

Senator M. TERESA RUIZ

District 29 (Essex)

SYNOPSIS

Establishes two-year pilot program requiring certain law enforcement agencies to coordinate with local schools districts to identify and assist at-risk youths.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



1 AN ACT establishing law enforcement pilot program for at-risk
2 youth.

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4 BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State
5 of New Jersey:

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7 1. a. As used in this act, an “at-risk youth” means a student
8 under the age of 18 who has been involved in a police related
9 incident in the school or community including, but not limited to,
10 being: arrested; reported missing; subjected to violence, including
11 domestic violence; a witness to the arrest of a parent or family
12 member; habitually truant; diagnosed with a mental health issue or
13 substance abuse issue; or affected by family substance abuse
14 problems.

15 b. There is established in the Department of Law and Public
16 Safety a two-year pilot program for at-risk youths to be
17 administered by the Office of the Attorney General in consultation
18 with the Commissioner of Education. Under the program,
19 participating county and municipal law enforcement agencies shall
20 coordinate with local schools districts to identify at-risk youths
21 within their communities and respond to their needs by providing
22 necessary intervention resources to promote their success and
23 prevent future criminal behavior or involvement with the criminal
24 justice system.

25 The Attorney General shall select law enforcement agencies to
26 participate in the program based on the commissioner’s
27 recommendation of the number of at-risk youths within a county or
28 municipality. In selecting law enforcement agencies to participate,
29 the Attorney General shall include at least two law enforcement
30 agencies in each of the northern, central, and southern regions of
31 the State and shall seek a cross section of urban, suburban, and rural
32 municipalities. The Attorney General shall have the discretion to
33 expand the program to more law enforcement agencies.

34 c. Participating law enforcement agencies shall conduct staff
35 meetings comprised of members of the agency who are assigned to
36 work with families and children. The purpose of the meetings shall
37 be to develop an action plan for each at-risk youth who has been
38 involved in a police related incident within the local school district
39 or community in the prior month. The action plan developed for
40 each at-risk youth may include, but not be limited to:

41 (1) connecting the at-risk youth with a variety of available
42 social and developmental resources;

43 (2) identifying a teacher or other adult employed by the school
44 district whom the at-risk youth trusts;

45 (3) identifying an available diversion program for first time
46 juvenile offenders;

47 (4) informing the school principal, a school social worker, or a
48 counselor of the specific needs of the at-risk youth;

1 (5) initiating family counseling, if available, with a licensed
2 social worker;

3 (6) identifying community or support groups in which the at-risk
4 youth may be eligible to participate; and

5 (7) scheduling periodic visits for the at-risk youth with a safe
6 schools resource officer or school liaison to law enforcement.

7 d. The Attorney General shall develop and submit to
8 participating law enforcement agencies a standard form to be used
9 when a juvenile is present during the arrest of a parent or guardian
10 or has witnessed a traumatic event. The form shall be completed by
11 the responding law enforcement officer and utilized to develop, if
12 necessary, an action plan pursuant to subsection c. of this section.

13 e. Law enforcement officers participating in the pilot program
14 shall interview every at-risk youth who has been reported missing
15 by a parent or legal guardian upon the youth's return. The
16 interview shall be a screening tool to identify at-risk youths who
17 may have engaged in, or been exposed to, a traumatic experience,
18 including but not limited to violence, physical or sexual abuse,
19 substance abuse, or depression. A record of the interview shall be
20 utilized to develop, if necessary, an action plan pursuant to
21 subsection c. of this section.

22 f. A safe schools resource officer or school liaison in the
23 school district served by a participating law enforcement agency
24 shall report to the law enforcement agency when a student is
25 habitually truant. The law enforcement agency shall maintain a
26 record of the report for discussion at the staff meeting pursuant to
27 subsection c. of this section and, if necessary, to develop an action
28 plan.

29 g. In establishing the pilot program, the Office of the Attorney
30 General and the Commissioner of Education shall consult with
31 county or municipal law enforcement agencies that have
32 implemented similar programs.

33 h. The Attorney General and Commissioner of Education shall
34 develop procedures for the evaluation of the impact of the pilot
35 program established pursuant to this section and shall report to the
36 Governor and, pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-
37 19.1), the Legislature 12 months after the organization of the pilot
38 program and within six month after the expiration of the pilot
39 program. The reports shall include the nature and scope of
40 intervention on behalf of participating law enforcement agencies;
41 data pertaining to the recidivism rates of juveniles identified as at-
42 risk youths; the success rates of action plans developed pursuant to
43 subsection c. of this section; and recommendations for any
44 modifications that may be made to the program. The reports also
45 shall evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot program and recommend
46 whether the program should be continued or expanded.

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- 1 (3) identifying an available diversion program for first time
- 2 juvenile offenders;
- 3 (4) informing the school principal, a school social worker, or a
- 4 counselor of the specific needs of the at-risk youth;
- 5 (5) initiating family counseling, if available, with a licensed
- 6 social worker;
- 7 (6) identifying community or support groups in which the at-risk
- 8 youth may be eligible to participate; and
- 9 (7) scheduling periodic visits for the at-risk youth with a safe
- 10 schools resource officer or school liaison to law enforcement.

11 In addition, the Attorney General would be required to develop
12 and submit to participating law enforcement agencies a standard
13 form to be used when a juvenile is present during the arrest of a
14 parent or guardian or has witnessed a traumatic event. The form
15 would be completed by the responding law enforcement officer and
16 utilized to develop, if necessary, a youth's action plan.

17 Law enforcement officers participating in the pilot program
18 would be required to interview every at-risk youth who has been
19 reported missing by a parent or legal guardian upon the youth's
20 return. The interview would be a screening tool to identify at-risk
21 youths who may have engaged in, or been exposed to, a traumatic
22 experience, including but not limited to violence, physical or sexual
23 abuse, substance abuse, or depression. A record of the interview
24 would be used to develop, if necessary, a youth's action plan.

25 Finally, the bill requires a safe schools resource officer or school
26 liaison in the school district served by a participating law
27 enforcement agency to report to the law enforcement agency when a
28 student is habitually truant. The law enforcement agency would be
29 required to maintain a record of the report for discussion at the staff
30 meeting and, if necessary, the development of an action plan.

31 The bill allows the Attorney General and Commissioner of
32 Education to consult with county or municipal law enforcement
33 agencies that have implemented similar programs when establishing
34 the pilot program. The bill requires the Attorney General and
35 Commissioner of Education to develop procedures for the
36 evaluation of the impact of the pilot program and report to the
37 Governor and the Legislature 12 months after the organization of
38 the pilot program and within six month after the expiration of the
39 pilot program. The reports are to include the nature and scope of
40 intervention on behalf of participating law enforcement agencies;
41 data pertaining to the recidivism rates of juveniles identified as at-
42 risk youths; the success rates of the individual action plans; and
43 recommendations for any modifications that may be made to the
44 program. In addition, the bill requires the report to evaluate the
45 effectiveness of the pilot program and recommend whether the
46 program should be continued or expanded.