

Communications Regarding CESSA Misinformation (Myth Busters)

Official communication from Illinois Department of Human Services/Division of Mental Health

Updated: November 14, 2022

What is the Community Emergency Services and Support Act (CESSA)?

On August 25, 2021, Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker signed into law the Community Emergency Services and Supports Act (CESSA), also known as the Stephon Watts Act. This new legislation requires emergency response operators such as those at 911 centers, to refer calls seeking mental and behavioral health support to a new service that can dispatch a team of mental health professionals instead of police. This marks a significant change in policy.

The implementation details for this new law are administered by the Secretary of the Department of Human Services, who will work in concert with the 911 Administrator at the Illinois State Police, the EMS administrators under the purview of the Illinois Department of Public Health, and Statewide and Regional Advisory Committees to be established through appointment by the Secretary. Work to implement CESSA is underway and includes multiple meetings held consistent with the [Illinois Compiled Statutes \(ILCS\) Open Meetings Act \(OMA\)](#). This fact sheet provides additional clarification around previously posted information.

When will CESSA be Implemented?

The CESSA Act creates the Statewide Advisory Committee to review and make recommendations for aspects of coordinating 911 and the 988 Mobile Crisis Response (MCR) system most appropriately addressed on a State level" to achieve the intent of the legislation. The Statewide Advisory Committee will serve as the oversight and governance structure for the implementation of this legislation under the auspice of the Secretary of the Department of Human Services.

Regional Advisory Committees, utilizing the pre-existing EMS Medical Directors Committee structures under the Department of Public Health's eleven (11) EMS regions, will be charged with the development of regional best practices and protocols consistent with the realities of the locale. Once approved at the regional level, these protocols and best practices will be presented to the Statewide Advisory Committee for review and approval prior to submission to each EMS System Medical Director for approval and system plan amendment, and then the Illinois Department of Public Health for final approval pursuant to the EMS Act.

The process includes identifying needed changes in protocols and standards, developing those through the work of the Regional Committees, obtaining full approval by all governing bodies, and full training of impacted staff.

Official notice concerning when these changes will become "operational" will be made by the 911 Administrator and the Illinois State Police, the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Administrators, and the Illinois Department of Public Health, and the Illinois Department of

Human Services, Division of Mental Health. Until then, current protocol should remain in place, as is.

What types of responders are included in the CESSA law?

Law enforcement must be integrated into processes so that individuals involved in low-level non-violent misdemeanors can be diverted to the mental health system. Law enforcement, EMS and mental health service providers are working well together in many Illinois communities. Most communities in Illinois have Law Enforcement, EMS and mental/behavioral health providers working collaboratively to meet the needs of persons experiencing a behavioral crisis as they always have, and without confusion.

For example, there are mental health teams existing and responding based on current experience and relationships in their communities. Some pre-existing issues between local law enforcement and EMS systems pre-date CESSA's work. However, CESSA is a process designed to facilitate local conversations and hopefully some of these issues can be resolved through increased opportunities to dialogue and collaborate as a result of this process.

An example reported in some parts of the state is confusion between EMS and law enforcement because, in instances where an individual may be suicidal and may have a weapon, law enforcement is not "securing" the site; and EMS, which is mandated to respond, will not enter an "unsecured" site to respond to the individual. This concern represents a complex issue that may have existed before CESSA. Over the ensuing months, it is expected that the CESSA process may play a role in resolving these and other issues by bringing key stakeholders together, locally and statewide, to have these discussions, and develop recommendations regarding clear expectations among the different emergency responding entities. *However, as previously stated, no protocols have changed as a result of CESSA at this time regarding dispatch decisions or behavior of first responder partners.*

Note: Other important information on legislative initiatives: There is no legislative or operational connection between CESSA and the Safety, Accountability, Fairness and Equity-Today (SAFE-T) Act. Other recently enacted legislation regarding criminal justice reforms, such as the SAFE-T Act, may be confused with the CESSA Act and can be contributing to the adoption of new practices in the field, attributed to CESSA, that should not be occurring at this time.

Where can I find more information?

Please visit: <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=143239> for the most up to date information.