

# Gov. Pritzker Signs Nation-leading Legislation Expanding Access To Mental Healthcare

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CHICAGO – Governor JB Pritzker today signed two pieces of legislation into law to establish a forward-thinking mental healthcare infrastructure in Illinois. House Bill 2595

requires medically necessary mental healthcare to be covered by insurance beginning January 1, 2023. Illinois follows California and Oregon in requiring coverage for mental, emotional, nervous, or substance use disorders. House Bill 2784 creates a first responder system that will coordinate 911 and 988 emergency responses when the national 988 mental health crisis line is established in the summer of 2022. This initiative – the first statewide approach of its kind in the nation – aims to reduce arrests for those with mental illnesses who are deserving of a specialist’s intervention.

“I’m proud and inspired to be a part of making bold changes to our mental healthcare services in Illinois that will help all Illinoisans receive the essential services and care they need, no matter where they live or their socioeconomic status,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Mental healthcare is healthcare. It’s medically necessary, it’s lifesaving, and it can help address the systemic trauma that has held many communities back for far too long.”

“Access to affordable mental healthcare is a right and not a privilege. Right now, 56% of Americans who need mental healthcare don’t receive it. As more and more people are feeling stressed, helpless, and grief-stricken, we must do everything we can to fight our way through this pandemic,” said Lt. Governor Stratton. “With the signing of these bills, Illinois ensures that there will be increased access to the professionals and the resources needed to manage a crisis, create safe spaces, and improve mental health outcomes for the people who need it most. We must remove the stigma around mental healthcare, and these bills are a step in the right direction.”

## House Bill 2595

To expand access to quality and reliable insurance for mental healthcare, HB 2595 requires every insurer to provide coverage to all medically necessary mental healthcare across the state. This includes the treatment of mental, emotional, nervous, or substance use disorders starting January 1, 2023.

The legislation requires the Illinois Department of Insurance to file a joint report on mental, emotional, nervous, or substance use condition parity to the General Assembly no later than January 1, 2022.

“Today, Illinois takes a critical step forward toward ending discrimination against people with mental health and substance use disorders—making the promise of equal access to treatment a reality,” said former U.S. Rep. and founder of The Kennedy Forum, Patrick J. Kennedy. “With his signature, Governor Pritzker makes Illinois a national leader in holding insurers accountable for following nationally recognized clinical standards of care.”

“The Governor’s signing of HB 2595 further strengthens Illinois’ commitment to ensuring consumer access to medically necessary treatment of mental, emotional, nervous, or substance use disorders or conditions,” said Dana Popish Severinghaus, Acting Director of the Illinois Department of Insurance. “The Illinois Department of Insurance was the first state insurance department to administer targeted mental health market conduct exams for companies selling health plans on the ACA Marketplace. We will continue to lead by example to protect Illinoisans, reduce barriers to care, and achieve mental health and substance use disorder parity.”

“Increasing access to mental health treatment is vital to every Illinoisan, especially now, when the crisis has been made worse by the pandemic,” State Senator Laura Fine (D-Glenview) said. “This law will ensure families can more easily seek treatment for mental, emotional, nervous or substance use disorders without worrying about insurance coverage.”

“Our communities are facing mental health and addiction crisis that is only worsening,” Rep. Deb Conroy (D-Villa Park). “This legislation will increase access to mental health treatment, giving people with mental health and substance use disorders the ability to access treatment sooner and get on the road to recovery.

House Bill 2595 is effective January 1, 2023.

## House Bill 2784

The Community Emergency Services and Support Act – also known as the Stephon Edwards Watts Act – requires all Illinois municipalities to coordinate 911 and 988 services, with the goal of prioritizing community care over incarceration or improper use of force when it comes to mental or behavioral health emergencies.

When an individual is dispatched through a 911 system, HB 2784 ensures that an appropriate mobile response is available, requiring 911 call center operators to coordinate with mobile mental and behavioral health services, established by the Illinois Department of Human Service’s Division of Mental Health (DMH).

“Thank you, Governor Pritzker, for signing HB 2784. This new law will provide all Illinois residents with the community care and compassion they need when dealing with mental and behavioral health emergencies,” said Grace B. Hou, Secretary, Illinois Department of Human Services. “IDHS and our Division of Mental Health (DMH) will provide training and guidance to mobile health units and police officers, so they are equipped and ready to respond to these extremely important emergencies and life events.”

The DMH helps individuals with mental illnesses recover and participate fully in community life. Under this law, DMH will provide guidance on coordinating mobile units, when responding to an individual who is experiencing a crisis. The Division will also establish regional advisory committees in each Emergency Medical Services (EMS) region to advise on mental and behavioral health emergency response systems. To ensure lasting change, the law requires appropriate responder training, which helps train police officers when responding to mental health emergencies.

“It's painful to imagine experiencing a mental health crisis and being put in the care of someone who doesn't have proper training instead of being connected with someone that can actually provide the proper help that is so desperately needed,” said State Senator Robert Peters (D-Chicago). “That often causes a lot of anger and frustration during an already vulnerable situation. Today, with the signing of House Bill 2784, we can feel confident that people who are going through a mental health emergency will be treated by mental and behavioral health professionals. With policies like this, Illinois is leading the country in building treatment over trauma.”

“With Governor Pritzker’s signature today, Illinois continues to lead the nation with progressive policies that will make a real difference in our constituents’ lives,” Rep. Kelly Cassidy (D-Chicago). “True public safety comes from making the best use of resources and applying them appropriately. I am incredibly thankful to the Watts family for turning their tragedy into meaningful change for communities.

HB 2784 is effective January 1, 2022.

The legislation builds upon the administration’s commitment to establishing partnerships with law enforcement and mental health resources; therefore, reducing arrests of those who suffer from mental illnesses.

Previously, the Governor signed the First Responder Mental Health Bill, which creates a database and webpage with a comprehensive collection of mental health resources specifically geared toward first responders. The administration is also strengthening Illinois’ crisis mental health infrastructure ahead of next year’s nationwide rollout of 988.

Last month, the Governor signed legislation that made Illinois one of the first states in the nation to expand access to telehealth coverage, turning the state’s emergency pandemic response into a permanent reality.