

The SC Responsible Mental Health Emergency Reform Act of 2014

Primary Points

1. Make all community mental health centers **24 hours** and staff hospitals that are half-empty, like Patrick B. Harris.
2. Require a minimum of **8 hours of Crisis Intervention Team training** for all prison and police officers per year.
3. Expand mental health court beyond the 4 counties in the State. Require **all 46 counties** to have this program over time.
4. Create a grant to for mental health groups to establish a mentor program for mentally ill individuals when they leave prison, and possibly working with parole.
5. Apply whatever standards of care the prisons have to the county jails.

Other Possibilities for the Act

1. Work with the Department of Education for early awareness in elementary, middle and high schools.
2. Move to get mental health agencies to work closely with **drug and alcohol abuse**. **85%** of people with a mental health disorder "self medicate".
3. Make changes to the criminal statutes to allow judges more leeway when dealing with charges that may have stemmed from a medical mentally ill basis.
4. Outline that this **act will save lives and make our communities safer!**
5. The most important detail I left out of the five primary points is the need for more psych hospital beds. We have gone from **3,500 beds 40 years ago in the state, to only 400 beds in the present**, while almost doubling our population. My concern is that if we try to put this in our bill, initially, support for the bill will balk because of the cost.

Summary Statement

The goal of this legislation is to stop the staggeringly expensive and vicious criminal cycle that those suffering from severe mental illnesses often fall into during episodes of their respective medical issues. Through the application of the above concepts, these goals can be achieved.

It is my firm belief that this bill will save South Carolina taxpayers millions of dollars, while not only improving but also saving lives. In turn, our communities will be safer and we will be able to mitigate the risks faced by police officers when dealing with persons suffering from mental health crises.

If the bill acts as intended, it will reduce the number of severely mentally ill prisoners in our corrections system, because it will stop the cycle of incarceration. If, for instance, we reduce the number of mentally ill prisoners by half – from 3500 to 1750 – the state will save more than \$30 million annually in corrections costs alone. That figure doesn't include the ancillary costs of emergency rooms, lawyers, public defenders, courts, police, lawsuits, and most importantly, the cost that you can't put a figure on, that of human lives.