

Bills Recommended by the Law and Justice Interim Committee

LC0307 - Crisis intervention and jail diversion grant program ... The first in a package of three bills to address diversion of mentally ill persons from entering the justice system, LC0307 creates a grant program to reimburse counties for up to 50% of county expenditures for crisis intervention, jail diversion, and participation in an involuntary precommitment cost insurance pool. The goal is to give counties assistance and an incentive to develop local crisis intervention services to divert mentally ill persons from jail and to avoid using the Montana State Hospital for emergency detention. The bill relies on a general fund appropriation in an amount yet to be determined. Rep. Stoker agreed to carry this bill if he is re-elected.

LC0516 - State contracting for local emergency detention beds pending involuntary commitment... The second bill in the package of three will direct the Department of Public Health and Human Services to contract for up to three beds in each mental health service area for emergency detention and evaluation pending a commitment hearing. The bill relies on a general fund appropriation in an amount yet to be determined. This bill is aimed at developing local capacity for detention and evaluation after an involuntary commitment petition has been filed. This local capacity would help reduce the number of admissions to the Montana State Hospital (MSH) pending a commitment hearing. These types of admissions now account for 63% of all MSH admissions. Rep. Stoker will also carry this bill.

LC0517 - Short-term inpatient treatment alternative to involuntary commitment... The third bill in the package of three will provide an alternative to involuntary commitment by allowing for the suspension of an involuntary commitment hearing if the respondent agrees to 14-days of short-term inpatient treatment. The bill will include provisions directing the Department of Public Health and Human Services to contract for up to three short-term inpatient treatment beds in each mental health service area. This bill also relies on a general fund appropriation in an amount yet to be determined, but is designed to offer an alternative to what many testified was a cumbersome, expensive, all-or-nothing, and adversarial judicial process not in a respondent's best interest. It also offers respondents the opportunity to access treatment without having the stigma of involuntary commitment. This bill will also be carried by Rep. Stoker.

LC0329 - Jail suicide prevention pilot program ... To address the problem of a high suicide rate in Montana's jails (more than 3 suicides annually statewide, which, per capita, is among the highest jail suicide rate in the nation), the Committee will recommend enactment of a jail suicide prevention pilot project. Under the Committee's bill, the Department of Public Health and Human Services would contract with a mental health provider to offer selected counties a video or telephonic "help line" so that a mental health professional can employ a standardized suicide screening tool and trigger appropriate follow-up protocols. The project would be modeled after the Kentucky Jail Mental Health Crisis Network, which has achieved national recognition for a dramatic 80% reduction in Kentucky's jail suicide rate. This bill will include an appropriation from the general fund and be carried by Rep. Ebinger, if he is re-elected.