

# News...



*from the Illinois General Assembly*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

State Rep. Kelly M. Cassidy  
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## **Mental Health First Responders Bill Passes Both Chambers**

**SPRINGFIELD** – The Illinois House took final action today on a bill to require an appropriate mental health response to emergency calls for assistance in instances of a mental health crisis. HB2784, named for Stephon Edward Watts of Calumet City, a young man with autism shot by police in his home when his parents sought help when he was in crisis.

The bill was an initiative of Access Living which has been working on the proposal with the Watts family since Stephon's killing in 2012, and has been reintroduced for the last 4 years. The bill is also known as the Community Emergency Services and Support Act (CESSA) and will require local governments who provide emergency response and transportation services for physical health emergencies to also provide emergency response and transportation services to mental and behavioral health emergencies. It now heads to Governor Pritzker for his signature.

As the lead House sponsor, Representative Kelly Cassidy said, "With the passage and implementation of CESSA, no family will ever have to fear that seeking help for their loved ones might result in their death. I am eternally grateful to the Watts family for their devoted advocacy so that their experience and loss can be prevented in the future."

Calumet City Mayor Thaddeus Jones, also a State Representative, spoke of the impact of Stephon's killing on his community, "Stephon's death remains a wound on the Calumet City community. Passage of this bill today begins the healing process and will prevent further tragedies such as what the Watt's family experienced."

Senate sponsor Robert Peters added, "When we call an emergency number for a medical issue, we get a medical response, with this legislation, our communities will be able to get a mental health response when they're having a mental health emergency," Peters said. "This is real safety and justice for all."

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