

Date of Hearing: April 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2217 (Zbur) – As Introduced February 19, 2026

Policy Committee: Public Safety

Vote: 8 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill re-establishes and expands the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion pilot program under the new name Alternatives to Arrest (ATA), broadening eligibility for prebooking diversion and social contact referrals and conditioning program funding on future appropriation by the Legislature

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) to award grants to the public health agencies administering qualifying programs in the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles, in addition to the existing authority to award grants competitively to up to three jurisdictions.
- 2) Expands the list of offenses eligible for prebooking diversion or social contact referrals to include shoplifting, petty theft, misdemeanor trespass, second-degree burglary, specified disorderly conduct offenses, and other violations identified by local jurisdictions with agreement of local law enforcement and public health leadership.
- 3) Broadens social contact referral criteria by removing requirements that officers verify prior involvement in drug or prostitution activity, that the involvement occurred within the program area and within 24 months, and that the individual not have a pending case in drug or mental health court.
- 4) Conditions all program funding on future appropriation by the Legislature and removes the original \$15 million General Fund appropriation, which has been fully expended.
- 5) Requires BSCC to report to the Legislature on the effectiveness of the program by January 1, 2031.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

- 1) Costs contingent on future appropriation. The original \$15 million General Fund appropriation for the predecessor LEAD program has been fully expended and the program is no longer active. The bill conditions all new grant funding on future appropriation by the Legislature; absent an appropriation, no grants would be issued. The bill's sponsor has submitted a budget request of \$15 million to fund the expanded program.

- 2) Approximately \$478,000 annually (General Fund) to BSCC for program administration, including staffing for grant management, monitoring, and outcome measurement. BSCC estimates needing 1.0 field representative, 0.5 analyst, 0.5 research data specialist, and 0.25 research data analyst. These administrative costs would typically be funded at 5% of the total program appropriation.
- 3) Unknown, potentially significant costs for an independent evaluation of program effectiveness, required to be reported to the Legislature by January 1, 2031. BSCC contracted with CSU Long Beach to evaluate the original LEAD program at a cost of \$400,000 in 2020; BSCC anticipates a new evaluation contract would exceed that amount. The bill does not specify the level of detail required to measure “effectiveness,” which could affect the scope and cost of the evaluation — for example, measuring recidivism outcomes requires individual-level data and more advanced research capacity.

#### COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author, incarceration does not address the root causes of crime and often exacerbates the underlying issues of poverty, housing instability, and untreated mental illness and substance use that contribute to low-level offending. This bill establishes the ATA program to connect vulnerable individuals to services instead of incarcerating them.
- 2) **Background.** The LEAD pilot program was established in the 2016–17 budget to improve public safety and reduce recidivism by connecting people who commit low-level offenses to social services rather than cycling them through arrest, booking, and incarceration. The program operates through two pathways: prebooking diversion, where an officer with probable cause to arrest instead refers the individual to a case manager for crisis services and an intake assessment, with charges held in abeyance if the assessment is completed within 30 days; and social contact referrals, where an officer identifies a person at high risk of future arrest and refers them to case management on a voluntary basis. Services available through the program include housing, medical and mental health care, substance use treatment, employment training, and civil legal services. The model emphasizes collaboration among law enforcement, public health agencies, and community-based providers to address the root causes of repeat low-level offending — primarily untreated mental illness, substance use, and homelessness.

The original program awarded grants to San Francisco and Los Angeles. A 2020 evaluation by CSU Long Beach found significant reductions in arrests among LEAD participants. In San Francisco, at the 12-month follow-up, felony arrests were 257% higher, misdemeanor arrests 623% higher, and felony cases 360% higher for the comparison group than for LEAD participants. In Los Angeles County, felony arrest rates were 537% higher and misdemeanor arrest rates 153% higher for non-LEAD participants at the 12-month follow-up. More recent data from the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services confirms low recidivism and high retention rates among current program participants.

State funding has been fully expended and the program is no longer active, though Los Angeles County has continued operating its program with local resources. In 2023, the Committee on the Revision of the Penal Code recommended re-establishing LEAD with an expanded list of eligible offenses including theft, burglary, and trespassing. This bill implements those recommendations under the renamed Alternatives to Arrest program, while also significantly broadening social contact referral criteria by removing requirements that

officers verify prior involvement in drug or prostitution activity, that the involvement occurred within the program area and within 24 months, and that the individual not have a pending case in drug or mental health court. The bill conditions all new funding on future appropriation by the Legislature.

- 3) **Prior Legislation.** SB 843 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 33, Statutes of 2016, established the LEAD pilot program for the purpose of improving public safety and reducing recidivism by increasing the availability and use of social service resources while reducing costs to law enforcement agencies and courts stemming from repeated incarceration.

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