
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

Senator Akilah Weber Pierson, Chair

BILL NO: AB 2247
AUTHOR: Elhawary
VERSION: May 18, 2026
HEARING DATE: June 17, 2026
CONSULTANT: Reyes Diaz

SUBJECT: Trauma Healing and Resilience Investment for Victimized and Exposed Youth Act

SUMMARY: Establishes the Trauma Healing and Resilience Investment for Victimized and Exposed Youth Act pilot grant program in four counties, only until January 1, 2032, to the extent that funds are provided, to pay for mental health and counseling services for youth survivors of gun violence.

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Medi-Cal program, administered by the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), which provides medical coverage to low-income persons. [WIC §14000, et seq.]
- 2) Establishes the California Victim Compensation Board, which administers the Restitution Fund from which the state, as declared by the Legislature, deems it the public interest to assist residents of the state in obtaining compensation for the pecuniary losses they suffer as a direct result of criminal acts. [GOV §13900-§139745]

This bill:

- 1) Establishes the Trauma Healing and Resilience Investment for Victimized and Exposed Youth Act (THRIVE) pilot grant program, only until January 1, 2032, administered by DHCS, only to the extent that funds are provided from the THRIVE Youth Fund (the Fund) for these purposes.
- 2) Requires DHCS to award the Counties of Alameda, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Solano, a grant to establish and administer a program to pay for mental health and counseling services for youth survivors of gun violence who request those services and who reside in those counties. Requires DHCS to develop a formula to determine the amount of funds to be allocated to each grantee, using data from the most recent three-year period to estimate the number of youth survivors in each county, and allocating funds proportionally based on those numbers.
- 3) Creates the Fund within the State Treasury. Moneys deposited into the fund, upon appropriation by the Legislature, may be expended by DHCS for the purposes in this bill.
- 4) Permits DHCS to enter into agreements with one or more entities to facilitate the implementation of the THRIVE grant program, which may not exceed 5% of funds appropriated for purposes in this bill, including, but not limited to, any of the following:
 - a) Providing technical assistance to grantees and community-based organizations receiving grant funding;
 - b) Conducting outreach or supporting grantees to conduct outreach to youth and families who may be eligible for THRIVE; and,
 - c) Evaluating the grant program data and information and preparing a public report.

- 5) Prohibits DHCS, except as permitted elsewhere in this bill, from expending more than 5% of funds appropriated for the purposes in this bill on its administrative costs.
- 6) Requires DHCS to award a first round of grants to each county within nine months of funds being appropriated for this purpose, or within nine months of the enactment of this bill, whichever is later. Requires DHCS to award grants each fiscal year thereafter for which funds are available, on a timeline it determines.
- 7) Requires each county to use funds awarded to establish and administer a program to pay for mental health and counseling services for youth survivors within the county who request those services. Permits a county to designate a lead agency—except for any law enforcement agency as a lead agency—for the purposes of administering a program.
- 8) Permits grantees awarded these funds to provide stipends to youth survivors directly, or to their parents or guardians for survivors who are minors, to pay for their own mental health and counseling services; pay providers or peer support specialists directly for mental health and counseling services on behalf of youth survivors; or, provide funds to one or more community-based organizations, to distribute in stipends to youth survivors to pay for mental health and counseling services, or to pay providers directly to provide these services.
- 9) Prohibits more than 10% of the funds from being used to support program administration of the grantee or of a community-based organization that receives funds from a grantee.
- 10) Requires grantees to establish policies and procedures for distributing funds to youth survivors that comply with all of the following:
 - a) Allow youth survivors, or their parents or guardians for survivors who are minors, to attest to their experiences of gun violence without requiring external documentation of the gun violence incident, and to select a licensed mental health services provider or peer support specialist of their choice, regardless of whether the provider or specialist accepts insurance, Medi-Cal, or another form of coverage;
 - b) Provide youth survivors with a list of mental health care providers and peer support specialists in the county with expertise in recovery from trauma or violence. This list may include, but is not limited to, providers trained under the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Aware Initiative, or that are listed in the statewide ACEs Aware Clinician Directory, and who provide individual counseling;
 - c) Do not exclude youth survivors on the basis of citizenship or immigration status; of an arrest, conviction, or juvenile adjudication record; or, of a status under correctional supervision; and,
 - d) Establish a mechanism to ensure youth survivors are not required to incur out-of-pocket mental health and counseling expenses or wait to be reimbursed for those costs.
- 11) Prohibits grantees from requiring, as a condition of receiving mental health and counseling services, that a youth survivor report any crime to a law enforcement agency, or require documentation from law enforcement of the incident of gun violence.
- 12) Deems that a youth survivor who has, or is eligible for, a government or private health insurance program that might also provide mental health and counseling services, or funds for such services, remains eligible to receive funds from a grantee to pay for mental health and counseling services from a licensed mental health services provider or peer support specialist of their choosing who is out of network or not fully covered by another program; at

a rate that is reasonable for the type of service, licensure, and geographic area in which the youth survivor resides; and, in an amount not to exceed \$7,800 annually. Prohibits a youth survivor from being denied assistance from a grantee solely on the basis of having another source of funding for mental health care services generally if that source is not able to fully cover services from the provider or peer support specialist of the youth survivor's choosing at a rate that is reasonable for the type of service, licensure, and geographic area in which the youth survivor resides, in an amount not to exceed \$7,800 annually.

- 13) Prohibits a stipend or payment, notwithstanding any other law, from reducing a youth survivor's maximum benefit allowance provided by the California Victim Compensation Board, except that an expense for specific purposes paid in full for a youth survivor under this bill shall not be eligible for reimbursement or payment by the board for the same purposes.
- 14) Requires DHCS annually to issue a public report, posted on its website, on the impact of the THRIVE grant program, key conclusions, populations served, and the benefits conferred or realized, using quantitative and qualitative data. Permits DHCS to require grantees to maintain and submit nonidentifying data about program implementation for the purpose of compiling a report. Prohibits DHCS from requiring grantees to submit any information that could identify individual youth survivors or their family members.
- 15) Requires any portion of a grant that a grantee does not use in the grant period to revert to the Fund.
- 16) Requires contracts or grants awarded to be exempt from personal services contracting requirements and from the Public Contract Code and the State Contracting Manual, and prohibits them from being subject to the approval of the Department of General Services.
- 17) Requires client information and records of mental health services provided pursuant to this bill to be confidential and exempt from inspection under the California Public Records Act.
- 18) Requires the state to be immune from any liability resulting from the implementation of this bill.
- 19) Permits DHCS to implement and administer the THRIVE grant program through all-county letters or similar instruction that shall have the same force and effect as regulations.
- 20) Makes findings and declarations that this bill imposes a limitation on the public's right of access to the meetings of public bodies or the writings of public officials and agencies. The Legislature further finds that in order to protect the privacy and safety concerns of victims of violent crime, and to provide records relating to private health care services, it is necessary that this bill limit the public's right of access to that information.

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, this bill results in General Fund cost pressures to DHCS of an unknown amount, potentially in the millions of dollars per year, or more, for grants alone. The bill requires DHCS to provide grants to four counties in the first year of implementation, and the bill states the intent is to appropriate funds sufficient to pay for every youth survivor in California to receive a minimum of one year of mental health and counseling services at an amount of \$7,800 per survivor, per year. Costs to DHCS and the selected lead agency to administer the program could also be significant.

PRIOR VOTES:

Assembly Floor:	58 - 17
Assembly Appropriations Committee:	11 - 4
Assembly Health Committee:	12 - 4

COMMENTS:

- 1) *Author's statement.* According to the author, when young people experience violence, timely support can make the difference between surviving and truly healing. But in California, too many youth, especially those in under-resourced communities, face real barriers to accessing mental health care after trauma. Existing systems are difficult to navigate, slow to respond, and often out of reach when support is needed most. Too many young survivors fall through the cracks. This bill creates more accessible pathways to care by allowing trusted, community-based organizations to directly support youth victims. This bill is about meeting young people where they are and making sure help is available when it matters most.

- 2) *Background.* In 2022 alone, per the California Firearm Injury Dashboard, nearly 2,000 children and youth 25 and under were injured or killed by an act of gun violence. The burden of violent victimization is not borne equally: Black youth in California are victims of gun violence at a rate 21 times that of their White peers, and Latino youth at a rate four times that of their White peers. Youth living in low-income communities are especially vulnerable, as one study found that the risk of death from a firearm injury for youth ages five to 25 increases significantly based on county poverty concentration, and estimated that nationally “more than half of all firearm-related deaths and two-thirds of all firearm-related homicides could be associated with living in a county with higher poverty concentration.” Lack of support for young people who have experienced trauma can leave lasting impacts, including on school and work, long term mental and physical health, and vulnerability to future victimization. Youth survivors of gun violence are at heightened risk for mental health and substance use disorders, and need support to recover following violence.

- 3) *Commission for Behavioral Health (CBH) report.* In 2025, CBH released “Stopping the Hurt: Preventing the Harms of Firearm Violence via Public Behavioral Health, The Impacts of Firearm Violence Project Report.” The report notes that firearm violence is not inevitable; it is predictable and preventable. Like heart disease, traffic accidents, and smoking-related illnesses, there are well-known pathways, risk factors, and interventions to reduce firearm violence and mitigate its harms. CBH identified three key findings and three recommendations to prevent firearm violence.
 - a) *Finding 1:* Firearm violence is a persistent threat to behavioral health, but California is not treating it that way.
Recommendation 1: California must establish trauma-informed violence prevention as a public behavioral health priority.
 - b) *Finding 2:* California faces challenges for effective firearm violence prevention stemming from misconceptions, cultural tensions, and fear.
Recommendation 2: California must deploy a public engagement initiative to regain trust and build relationships with firearm-owning communities and communities impacted by violence.
 - c) *Finding 3:* California's public investments have not been coordinated effectively to address the underlying causes of violence and other public health concerns.

Recommendation 3: California must develop a unified statewide strategy, with an appointed leader, to guide a public health approach to firearm violence prevention that integrates data, resources, and partners from across sectors.

The CBH report notes that the direct effects of firearm violence can be debilitating for those harmed, but the subsequent effects of these incidents ripple out even farther, and they are not limited to any person, group, or generation. They affect all Californians. Public survey data show that one-in-four people consider gunshots and shootings to be a problem in their neighborhood. Even more striking, roughly one-in-five Californians know someone who has been shot on purpose. Indirect firearm violence impacts a broad range of people, including those who witness a shooting, people living in the neighborhood where it occurs, people who have lost a loved one to violence, and those belonging to a group targeted by mass violence. Nearly half of Californians who are exposed to violence in their neighborhood experience social functioning problems, including issues with their job, school, or interacting with their friends and family. People helping victims of violence, such as first responders, hospital workers, and behavioral health providers, are also impacted. These and other forms of indirect exposure to firearm violence can cause anxiety, fear, depression, difficulty focusing, and a host of other trauma- and anxiety-related symptoms. The report states an opportune time to intervene in the cycle of trauma and violence is after violence has occurred. Those who are directly or indirectly harmed by violence are at higher risk for continuing health and mental health challenges if their trauma is not addressed. The necessary ingredients for healing this trauma vary by person, but one of the most evidence-based factors for healing is community.

- 4) *Double referral.* This bill is double referred. Should it pass out of this Committee, it will be referred to the Senate Committee on Judiciary.
- 5) *Related legislation.* AB 2378 (Gabriel and Wicks) would, among other things, establish the Office of Community Violence Intervention to administer the California Violence Intervention and Prevention Grant Program (CalVIP), advise the Board of State and Community Corrections on implementation of community violence intervention policies, and provide technical assistance to CalVIP grantees. *AB 2378 is set for hearing on June 23, 2026, in the Senate Public Safety Committee.*
- 6) *Prior legislation.* AB 785 (Sharp-Collins of 2025) and AB 2064 (Jones-Sawyer of 2024) would have created the Community Violence Interdiction Grant Program to be administered by California Health and Human Services Agency to provide funding to local community programs for community-driven solutions to decrease violence in neighborhoods and schools. *AB 785 and AB 2064 were held in the Senate Appropriations Committee.*

AB 1100 (Sharp-Collins of 2025) would have revised eligibility requirements for compensation by the California Victim Compensation Board, permitting payment to victims who are ineligible for compensation under existing law. *AB 1100 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.*

- 7) *Support.* Californians for Safety and Justice (CSJ), as the sponsor, and other supporters state that too many young victims of gun violence are not getting the help they need and deserve: a 2023 study found that three out of five children aged five to 18 who are injured by a firearm do not receive mental health services within six months following a firearm injury. And, in a 2019 poll of crime survivors, CSJ found that 41% of crime victims would have wanted

counseling or mental health support but never received it, compared to just 12% who received such help. For too long, public safety systems haven't helped victims or stopped crime cycles, despite billions spent every year. Instead, too much incarceration and bureaucracy—and too little crime prevention, rehabilitation, or trauma recovery—has meant that the cycle of harm continues.

- 8) *Is DHCS the best entity to administer?* While DHCS oversees mental health funding, other entities—such as the California Victim Compensation Board, the California Violence Intervention and Prevention Program, and the California Board of State and Community Corrections—appear currently to administer programs that provide compensation and grants for purposes similar to those outlined in this bill. These entities seem better equipped to fold in a stipend program envisioned by this bill over the state entity that deals mostly with ensuring compliance with mental health fund spending.

SUPPORT AND OPPOSITION:

- Support:** Californians for Safety and Justice (sponsor)
 All for Kids
 All of US or None
 All of US or None Orange County
 Back to the Start
 Brady United Against Gun Violence
 California Coalition for Women Prisoners
 California Public Defenders Association
 Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice
 Courage California
 Drug Policy Alliance
 East Bay Community Law Center
 Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
 Families Inspiring Reentry & Reunification 4 Everyone
 Fresh Lifelines for Youth
 GLIDE
 Legal Services for Prisoners With Children
 Prosecutors Alliance Action
 Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition
 Youth Alive!
- Oppose:** None received

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