

Date of Hearing: April 29, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2357 (Pellerin) – As Amended April 9, 2026

Policy Committee: Judiciary

Vote: 12 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill authorizes the Superior Court of Santa Cruz County and two other superior courts selected by the Judicial Council to conduct a pilot program providing no-cost mental health services to jurors and alternate jurors following receipt of a verdict in a criminal action alleging a violent felony.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the Judicial Council, for counties that elect to participate, to enter into memoranda of understanding with county behavioral health directors setting the number of available sessions, the access period, and contact information for jurors.
- 2) Permits a participating court to share information about available mental health resources with jurors following non-violent-felony criminal actions and civil actions at the court's discretion.
- 3) Terminates the pilot by January 1, 2034, requires participating courts to report results to the Judicial Council, and requires the Judicial Council to submit a consolidated report to the Legislature no later than July 1, 2035.
- 4) Sunsets the authorizing statute on January 1, 2036.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Costs of an unknown, but significant amount, to the counties participating in the pilot program. The bill authorizes no-cost mental health services for jurors through MOUs with county behavioral health directors, but does not identify a funding source. Depending on the funding source, these costs would not be reimbursed by the state.
- 2) Costs of an unknown, but likely significant amount, to the courts (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund). Judicial Council notes that the cost with providing these services to jurors would increase as juror participation increases. Increased pressure on the Trial Court Trust Fund may create a demand for increased funding for courts from the General Fund. The state budget provides annual General Fund backfills to the Trial Court Trust Fund to offset revenue reductions, totaling approximately \$117.3 million in 2025-26. The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year beginning in the 2027-28 fiscal year.

Consistent with the committee rules, this bill is a candidate for the committee's suspense file because it has the primary purpose of creating a pilot program.

COMMENTS:

1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

Jurors perform one of the most important civic duties in our democracy, yet we ask them to carry an extraordinary emotional burden with little support. In serious criminal trials, jurors are often exposed to graphic evidence and deeply traumatic testimony that can leave lasting impacts on their mental health, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD.

Jury service should not require a sacrifice of one's own mental health. AB 2357 establishes a pilot program to provide jurors with access to mental health services after a verdict, ensuring they have a structured opportunity to process the trial they've experienced. With a focus on highly traumatic cases, AB 2357 requires the Judicial Council of California to partner with county behavioral health departments through a memorandum of understanding, ensuring jurors are proactively linked to care.

2) **Background.** Jury service in violent felony cases can expose jurors to graphic testimony, images, and evidence, and jurors are prohibited from discussing the case during trial. In 2024, the Legislature enacted AB 2985 (Hart, Chapter 204, Statutes 2024), which requires courts to provide jurors with written information about mental health awareness and available services prior to discharge in violent felony cases. That statute addressed information access but did not provide the services themselves or cover their cost, leaving jurors to locate and fund mental health support on their own. This bill builds on AB 2985 by establishing a three-county pilot — Santa Cruz plus two others selected by the Judicial Council — to directly link jurors to no-cost mental health services through memoranda of understanding between the Judicial Council and participating county behavioral health directors. The mandate applies to violent felony trials, which encompasses 26 categories including murder, mayhem, rape, lewd acts on a child under 14, explosion of a destructive device causing death or great bodily injury, and arson. Participating courts may, at their discretion, extend the offer of services to jurors in other criminal cases and civil cases. Pilot results are reported to the Judicial Council, which in turn submits a consolidated report to the Legislature before the authorizing statute sunsets.

The County Behavioral Health Directors Association has raised serious concerns that the bill misaligns with the statutory and funded mission of county behavioral health. California county behavioral health departments are categorically restricted to serving individuals with serious mental illness, funded through dedicated revenue streams (2011 Realignment, the Mental Health Services Act, and federal Medicaid) that are not available to fund general mental health services for members of the public. Mild-to-moderate mental health needs — the likely category for most jurors — are the responsibility of managed care plans under California's Medi-Cal structure. Compliance with the pilot would require counties to divert resources from legally mandated services, which they report is neither fiscally feasible nor consistent with the statutory allocation rules governing county behavioral health funding.

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