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Legislative District 43
Baltimore City

Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair

Joint Committee on Ending
Homelessness

Chair

Joint Committee on Children,
Youth, and Families



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SUPPORT - SB 565/HB 736
POLICE OFFICER MENTAL HEALTH –
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Walderstreicher, and committee members,

Today, more than ever before, the men and women who make up our law enforcement community have increasing demands and stressors placed on them. Police officers face situations every day that endanger their health and safety and even their lives. The dangers are often mental and emotional as well as physical, and seeking help for that type of illness or injury can be harder than getting treatment for something more observable like a wound that needs stitching up or a broken bone. But an officer's mental state is just as important as their physical condition, and they need to be well and healthy in both areas to be able to carry out their responsibilities.

The implications of ignoring these issues are well known. Research indicates that when officers' mental health issues go unmanaged, job performance decreases, decision-making abilities are impaired, and agency costs increase. Everyone has a stake in promoting police officers' wellness, because it has a direct impact on officers' abilities to effectively serve their communities.

SB565 requires each law enforcement agency to provide access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for mental health services including:

- Counseling services;
- Crisis Counseling;
- Stress Management Counseling;
- Mental Health Evaluations; and
- Peer Support Services

SB565 does not require law enforcement agencies who already have County connected EAPs to develop and implement an additional program, those agencies would already be in compliance with the legislation.

SB565 does require law enforcement agencies to prioritize members' needs as it pertains to mental and physical wellness which studies have shown directly correlates to performance.

Why is this legislation important?

Law enforcement personnel respond to and witness some of the most tragic events in our communities on a daily basis. This stress can impact their physical and mental well-being.

For example, in 2019 alone, Baltimore City Police Department experienced several traumatic incidents to include two officer suicides, one attempted suicide, at least ten police involved shootings, several physical assaults on police officer, in addition to the routine requirements of policing.

Additionally, the National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) recently published that:

- Nearly **1 in 4** police officers has thoughts of suicide at some point in their life.
- The suicide rate for police officers is **1.5x higher** than the general population.
- More police die by suicide than in the line of duty. In 2017 alone, there were an **estimated 140 law enforcement suicides compared to 129 who died in the line of duty.**
- Compared to the general population, law enforcement report much **higher rates of depression, PTSD, burnout, and other anxiety related mental health conditions.**
- The Ruderman Family Foundation has further found that roughly **35% of police officers experience PTSD**, compared to 6.8% for the general population. As well, roughly 12% of officers experience depression, versus 6.8% for the general population.

Why should you support this legislation?

The Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 (LEMHWA) was signed into law in January 2018. It recognized that law enforcement agencies need and deserve support in their ongoing efforts to protect the mental health and well-being of their employees. The enactment of this legislation not only coincides with existing federal legislation, but it also reinforces the urgency of assistance that our police officers need throughout the state of Maryland. For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on SB565.

In Partnership,



Mary Washington