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Integrity...Fairness...Service

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The Honorable William C. Smith Jr., Chairman
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Senate Bill 326 – Public Safety – Law Enforcement Agencies – Peer Support Programs – Support

Chairman Smith,

I fully support SB 326. I am a 24-year veteran of the Baltimore County Police Department and an Army veteran. Currently I serve as the department's full-time Peer Support and Wellness manager responsible for assisting our departments over 2000 sworn and professional staff members with mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

According to research published in the Journal of Traumatic Stress, law enforcement officers are exposed to an average of 178 critical incidents throughout their career, while the average person encounters two to three traumatic events in their lifetime. Over the last several years a major priority for this legislature has been on police reform and understanding why officers engage in behaviors that are unprofessional, illegal, and inconsistent with their training. In the majority of those cases, if the stigma had been mitigated, and the proper training, resources, and support was given, those officers in the videos may not have gotten to the point where they are now national news.

Every day I encounter officers from throughout the agency and other jurisdictions who still express to me they are leery of anything related to mental health and peer support would be the last group of people they would talk to if they are suffering or in crisis. Without confidentiality officers withhold a majority of what they are experiencing for fear of the information being leaked to leadership, them being forced to testify in court even though the discussion is mental health centric and not about tactics or operations, and for fear of their friends, family, and co-workers learning they are struggling.

SB 326 will allow trained and vetted peer support team members across the State of Maryland to more effectively engage those who are in crisis or struggling by reinforcing the confidentiality aspect of peer support. Confidentiality allows fearful officers who may feel shame to come forward and seek help in their darkest moments.

I want to thank Senators Waldstreicher and McCray for introducing this legislation, and the honorable members of this committee for allowing me to provide my perspective as a peer support manager today. I urge you to send this bill for a vote and to make this a law to help our law enforcement officers thrive in their careers and personal lives, ultimately creating stronger community relations and safer interactions between officers and citizens.

Sgt. John Haddaway
Baltimore County Police Department



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