

SB326.pdf

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Position: FAV

MARYLAND PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY



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January 27, 2025

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

RE: Support – SB326: Public Safety - Law Enforcement Agencies - Peer Support Programs

Dear Chairman Smith and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1100 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS support SB326 because it would allow peer support personnel to provide emotional and psychological support services to law enforcement professionals in a confidential manner while also allowing for disclosure of privileged information under certain circumstances. Police officers or other law enforcement professionals must be trained in peer support skills and educated about their obligations under the bill, thus raising practice requirements to those similarly required of licensed mental health professionals. Ensuring confidentiality will increase the likelihood that law enforcement professionals suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or depression will seek needed care.

For all the reasons stated above, MPS/WPS ask this committee for a favorable report on SB326. If you have any questions regarding this testimony, please contact Lisa Harris Jones at lisa.jones@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society Legislative Action Committee

Letter in Support of SB 326.pdf

Uploaded by: Dave Rose

Position: FAV



BALTIMORE COUNTY LODGE NO. 4
FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

INCORPORATED

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DAVID M. ROSE
LODGE PRESIDENT

DONNA M. PATTERSON
LODGE SECRETARY

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

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

Chairman Smith,

I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 326, which aims to codify, with certain exceptions, the confidentiality of communications between law enforcement officers and peer support specialists. As a member of the Baltimore County Police Department, I have personally witnessed the profound impact that peer support networks have had in helping officers cope with the unique challenges and stressors associated with our profession.

In May 2018, following the tragic line-of-duty death of Officer Amy Caprio, our department began informal peer support meetings on the second floor of our lodge. These gatherings provided a vital space for officers to come together, grieve, and offer mutual support during an incredibly difficult time. Over the years, we recognized the need for a more formalized structure to ensure the well-being of our officers, and we have since established regular peer-to-peer meetings, often attended by members of our agency's peer counseling unit as well as mental health professionals from across the state and nation.

While these meetings have proven invaluable, one concern that has consistently been raised by our officers is the fear that their confidential communications may not be protected. Many officers are reluctant to speak freely about the personal and professional challenges they face, fearing that their words may be disclosed to management or others who do not need to know. The establishment of legal protections for confidential peer support communications, as outlined in SB 326, is essential in addressing this concern and ensuring that officers can engage in these critical conversations without fear of reprisal or breach of trust.

Currently, fire professionals in the state of Maryland are afforded the protection of confidentiality during peer support sessions. Law enforcement officers, however, do not have the same legal assurance. This bill would extend the same level of confidentiality to law enforcement officers, recognizing that we, too, are often exposed to traumatic incidents that require the same level of psychological support and care.

I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of SB 326 as written. This legislation will help foster a safer and more supportive environment for law enforcement officers, ultimately contributing to their mental health and overall effectiveness in serving our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Dave Rose
President
Baltimore County FOP Lodge #4

REPRESENTING THE PROFESSIONAL POLICE OFFICERS OF BALTIMORE COUNTY



Haddaway SB326 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: John Haddaway

Position: FAV

ROBERT O. MCCULLOUGH

Chief of Police



Integrity...Fairness...Service

BALTIMORE COUNTY POLICE

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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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SB326 Written Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Kathryn Greenbeck

Position: FAV

ROBERT O. MCCULLOUGH

Chief of Police



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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 am writing to fervently support Senate Bill 326, which will provide legal confidentiality to communications between police officers and their specially trained peers.

The Baltimore County Police Department recognizes that the employees of our agency are its most valuable asset. Situations and demands specific to the field of law enforcement result in unique stressors, which can cause both acute and cumulative stress reactions. These situations may be related to the employee's professional life, personal life, or both. We strive to assist first responders in crisis by mitigating the effects of all forms of stress to which our officers are routinely exposed.

In wake of the devastating loss of Officer Amy Caprio in 2018, FOP Lodge 4 started a Peer-to-Peer support group to bolster the mental wellness of our first responders and dispatchers. Shortly thereafter, our Department created the Peer Support & Wellness Team (PSWT), which consists of two permanently assigned sworn police officers: a sergeant and an officer. They coordinate a larger team of properly trained and recognized peers, who volunteer over and above their normal assignments to help their fellow employees who are experiencing the effects of one or more incidents in which the officer was either directly or indirectly involved. In addition, our PSWT offers advice, guidance, and access to programs that focus on officer safety, wellness, and resiliency via multiple platforms. The resources we currently utilize include outside wellness and resiliency vendors, videos, roll call training, specialized training, educational bulletins, and an app that provides access to a variety of resources.

Peer Support and Wellness Team members, upon acceptance onto the Team, are provided with training and certification on basic individual and group counseling techniques endorsed by the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, namely, Critical Incident Stress Management.

Confidentiality is crucial to the success of any Peer Support program. Maryland law does not currently does not provide privilege for communications between a peer and fellow first responders, as some States offer, but this is a vital component of an effective Peer Support program, particularly for law enforcement officers. SB326 will provide the same level confidentiality that is currently enjoyed by Maryland's fire fighters and I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of SB326 as written.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Lt. Kathryn Greenbeck
Baltimore County Police Department



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SB326 FAV - NAMI.pdf

Uploaded by: Michael Gray

Position: FAV

January 28, 2024

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and distinguished members of the Finance Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)-Maryland respectfully requests a favorable report on SB326.

NAMI Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for people living with mental illnesses, their families, and the wider community.

Peer support services are a vital part of the mental healthcare system. People living with mental health conditions, or anyone seeking mental health treatment, have the same right to privacy as any other patient or client—whether seeking treatment from a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, Certified Peer Recovery Specialist, other practitioners trained in peer support services, or any other provider of mental health services. Maryland’s first responders and peace officers, including law enforcement officers, can benefit from peer support services, and they should do so with complete confidence that records of those interactions are confidential.

SB326 would guarantee the privacy of the contents of any written or oral communication regarding a peer support interaction, unless it contains an explicit threat of suicide, a clear threat to others, or information regarding harm or neglect to children or vulnerable individuals. NAMI Maryland believes that SB326 includes adequate provisions for those circumstances and that passage of SB326 will provide encouragement and support to Maryland’s law enforcement officers in seeking peer support services.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on SB326.

Kathryn S. Farinholt
Executive Director
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland

Contact: Morgan Mills
Compass Government Relations
Mmills@compassadvocacy.com

Maryland State Police Position Paper SB326.docx.pd

Uploaded by: Owen Traynor

Position: FAV



State of Maryland
Department of State Police
Government Affairs Unit
Annapolis Office (410) 260-6100

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

DATE: January 30, 2025

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 326

POSITION: Support

BILL TITLE: Public Safety – Law Enforcement Agencies – Peer Support Programs

REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

This legislation seeks to establish confidentiality requirements for peer support counseling programs for law enforcement agencies. With certain exceptions, this legislation prohibits a peer support program participant from disclosing the contents of written or oral communications regarding a peer support interaction.

Under current law, a person who discusses mental health issues with their doctor, psychiatrist or psychologist can expect that with certain limitations, their conversations and notes taken by the person are protected from disclosure. Generally, the exceptions to disclosure are threats of suicide, threats of imminent and serious bodily harm, or information relating to the abuse or neglect of a child.

Law enforcement professionals are under increased stress, have a higher risk of suicide, and patrol our streets in the most stressful situations while armed. When police officers are willing to seek help when struggling, the State must ensure that they are able to reach that help. Yet, law enforcement officers are likely to refuse assistance after critical incidents and for other life stressors (marital, financial, familial, professional) if they can be compelled to testify about what they and others say during these post-critical incident interventions. Without confidentiality protections, Peer Support Team Members also fear negative consequences from their interactions and interventions with coworkers.

Senate Bill 326 provides the necessary confidentiality protections for officers and their peers who would help them deal with the stress of critical incidents or other dangers to their mental health. Peer Support, including critical incident interventions, are not incident process oriented. Peer Support interactions are not policy & procedure after action reviews. Peer team communications do not supersede mandated reporting for serious criminal law violations, danger to self or others, any other mandatory reporting such as suspected child abuse or neglect.

Peer Support offers assistance and appropriate support resources to employees when personal or professional problems negatively affect their work performance, family unit, or self and/or after critical incidents to provide psychoeducation and to mitigate traumatic stress reactions. Senate Bill 326 removes the stigma of worrying about what will happen to a law enforcement officer should they seek the help they need and deserve.

For these reasons, the Department of State Police urges the Committee to give Senate Bill 326 a favorable report.

MCPA-MSA_ SB 326 Peer Support Program-Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Samira Jackson

Position: FAV



Maryland Chiefs of Police Association Maryland Sheriffs' Association



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair and
Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Darren Popkin, Executive Director, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Andrea Mansfield, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Samira Jackson, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee

DATE: January 30, 2025

RE: **SB 326 – LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES – PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Chiefs of Police Association (MCPA) and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association (MSA) **SUPPORT SB 326**. This bill protects communication and affords certain confidentiality between law enforcement officers and their peer support counselling specialists.

Law enforcement officers face extremely difficult circumstances on the job every day. They put their lives on the line to protect and serve others, and can experience significant trauma when arriving at crash scenes; addressing incidents of domestic violence; investigating shootings and murders; and searching for lost children and vulnerable adults. This cumulative exposure to high-level stress, experienced over years of service, , can threaten the mental and physical well-being of officers, depending upon their individual coping skills and resiliency. It is important, and arguably necessary, that a safe space be created for officers to receive the help they need without fear of retaliation or intimate information being exposed.

SB 326 creates this essential environment and ensures law enforcement officers have access to high quality peer support. This support is an effective and early intervention means to address many mental health and occupational concerns that law enforcement officers face daily. This bill also ensures that information exchanged in peer support settings is held in confidence, and eliminates the potential of peer support specialists being compelled to testify in open court regarding the intimate details shared.

Forty states have or are in the process of approving similar legislation that will legally protect communications between law enforcement officers and their peer support counselling specialists. We hope Maryland will join these states.

This bill prioritizes the mental health of laws enforcement officers and allows them to seek the help they need with confidence. For these reasons, MCPA and MSA **SUPPORT SB 326** and urge a **FAVORABLE** committee report.

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SB0326-JPR_MACo_SWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Sarah Sample

Position: FWA



Senate Bill 326

Public Safety - Law Enforcement Agencies - Peer Support Programs

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: January 30, 2025

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS SB 326 WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill promotes more stability within the public safety workforce across Maryland, where employers currently face historic challenges and vacancies. It does so by expanding opportunities for law enforcement officers to seek support from their peers when struggling with the mental and emotional impacts of working in public safety.

This bill establishes an additional avenue of support for law enforcement officers who might be experiencing serious mental and emotional distress but might not yet be emotionally ready to seek medical attention from a professional. Counties believe SB 326 takes a balanced approach by authorizing confidential peer-to-peer interactions but also ensuring transparency and accountability for serious crimes and during exigent circumstances. MACo commends this effort and offers an amendment to include corrections officers in the provisions of the bill as these professionals have a comparable risk of severe injury, trauma, and long-term adverse health effects.

Public safety is a profession where, rightfully, courage and composure are always necessary. At the same time, law enforcement and detention center officers can be the targets of violence, and are often exposed to grave harms inflicted on vulnerable populations and children. This exposure is well known to take a serious toll on the mental and emotional wellbeing of these fundamental public safety officials. Speaking to a supervisor or a trained medical professional about personal mental and emotional challenges and insecurities can be intimidating. Having an option to talk to a trained peer can serve as a comfortable entry point for an individual to heal and potentially seek more help if needed.

Not only can SB 326 fortify these employees in a way that supports better outcomes for the community, but it can also create a team environment that relies on prioritizing mental health, trust, and support. There is a great deal of crossover between the corrections and law enforcement workforces, which is why considering their needs together will make them both stronger independent agencies.

As the rehabilitative arm of the justice system, corrections officers look out for and care for some of Maryland's most vulnerable populations, and are routinely exposed to situations that are damaging for mental health and wellbeing. They need and deserve resources and support systems to care for them, too. For these reasons, MACo urges a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** for SB 326.