

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2023 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
Third Reader

Senate Bill 527

(Senators Waldstreicher and Smith)

Judicial Proceedings

Appropriations

---

**Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities - Peer Support Programs**

---

This bill alters the term “peer support counseling program” to be “peer support program”; removes related references to counseling, counseling services, and counseling session; and requires that a peer support program and related services and training be evidence-based.

---

**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** None. The changes are technical in nature and do not directly affect governmental finances.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

---

**Analysis**

**Bill Summary/Current Law:** Pursuant to Chapters 151 and 152 of 2022, “peer support counseling program” means a program provided by a fire, rescue, or emergency medical services (EMS) entity or the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) that provides counseling services from a “peer support specialist” to a member of a fire, rescue, or EMS entity. The bill alters the defined term to be “peer support program” and modifies the definition to mean an *evidence-based* program that provides *evidence-based support*.

Under current law, “peer support specialist” means a member of a fire, rescue, or EMS entity or the IAFF who (1) has received training in peer support counseling and providing emotional and moral support to members of fire, rescue, or EMS entities who have been involved in or exposed to an emotionally traumatic experience in the course of duty as a member of a fire, rescue, or EMS entity and (2) is designated by the fire, rescue, or EMS

entity to provide these services. The bill requires that a peer support specialist have received *evidence-based* training in peer support.

Under current law, the disclosure of the contents of any written or oral communication regarding a peer support *counseling session* by a peer support specialist or a peer support participant is prohibited. The prohibition does not apply under specified circumstances. A peer support specialist must inform the peer support participant in writing of these confidentiality provisions before the initial peer support *counseling session* with a peer support participant. The bill replaces the terms *counseling session* with *interaction*.

Under current law, by October 1, 2024, the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA), in consultation with the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems, must develop a report on best practices and professional standards for a peer support counseling program, as specified. BHA must make the published report and a list of peer support specialist training programs publicly available on its website. Under the bill, the developed report on best practices and professional standards must be for an *evidence-based peer support program* and the list published on its website must be for *evidence-based* peer support specialist training programs.

**Additional Comments:** The Maryland Department of Health advises that the bill alters statutory language to accurately reflect the intended purpose of peer support programs.

---

### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

**Designated Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems; Maryland Department of Health; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 27, 2023  
rh/jc Third Reader - March 18, 2023

---

Analysis by: Amber R. Gundlach

Direct Inquiries to:  
(410) 946-5510  
(301) 970-5510