



POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: SB0074 Police Officers – Mental Health – Employee Assistance Programs

POSITION: SUPPORT

DATE: January 20, 2021

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 0074.

Senate Bill 0074 would require each law enforcement agency to provide access, at minimal cost, to mental health services for all police officers that an agency employs. As a recent meta-analysis of longitudinal studies demonstrates, a growing body of psychological and medical evidence establishes that stressors endemic to police work are associated with a wide variety of acute, negative mental and physical health outcomes for officers. John M. Violanti et al., *Police Stressors and Health: a State-of-the-Art Review*, 40(4) *Policing* 642-56, (2017), www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6400077. Accordingly, requiring each law enforcement agency to provide officers minimal cost access to mental health services is a sensible solution to the well-documented problem of police work stressors damaging officers' mental and physical wellness.

The benefits of offering law enforcement officers minimal cost mental health services would in all likelihood, however, extend beyond promoting officer well-being. Indeed, such services also promise to help protect citizens whom officers are tasked to protect and serve. Tragically, as in the case of [William H. Green](#) (and countless others), forceful and violent responses from police officers are too often not justified when considered against the conduct that stimulated the officer response. Expanding access to mental health services can better equip officers to avoid unnecessarily enacting violence on the human beings for whom they are professionally responsible.

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For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 0074.