

Testimony in Support of House Bill 0088

January 14, 2021

Police officers – Mental Health- Employee Assistance Programs

Suicide, Line-of-Duty Deaths and Police Stressors

- 228 police officers in the USA took their own lives in 2019. The rate is approaching twice the rate of duty-related deaths. (Statistics for 2020 are not yet available).
- 7 of those officers dying by their own hand were officers from Maryland.
- There are about 18,000 police departments in the USA. Only 5% have a suicide prevention programs.
- Records indicate that in 2019 police suicides exceeded line-of-duty deaths. (228/134)
- Suicides and deaths impact law enforcement mental health.
- 28 states have police peer support programs. Maryland is not one of them despite the fact that Maryland is the home of the non-profit, International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, which has trained those peer support teams in those 28 states.
- There are innumerable stressors in police work.

- Infant fatalities
- Spouse / partner abuse
- Cases of child abuse and neglect
- Disaster response
- Intervening in violence episodes
- Murders
- Robberies
- Working alone
- Disruption to family life
- Some unsupportive leaders
- Fires
- other

- Injuries to children
- Court time
- Abandoned children
- Elder abuse
- Sexual assaults
- Fatality auto accidents
- On the job injuries
- Shift work
- Threats against one's person
- Negative public attitudes
- Human trafficking

Stress Effects in Law Enforcement Personnel

- The stronger the stimulus, the greater the stress.
- Stress can be short or long term.
- Prolonged and excessive stress causes a wide range of cognitive, physical, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual effects including, but not limited to: anxiety, grief, depression, frustration, anger, marital discord, loneliness, loss of concentration, cognitive dysfunction, a wide range of physical problems such as headaches, gastro-intestinal distress, loss of faith, premature retirements, increased sick time and disability claims against their departments.
- Traumatic stress has the strongest psychological impact on law enforcement personnel particularly:
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:
 - Significant symptoms lasting longer than 30 days.
 - Intense psychological *arousal* to stimuli reminding a person about the traumatic event.
 - *Intrusive memories*, which are unbidden thoughts and images that flood a person's mind in the aftermath of a serious traumatic event.
 - *Avoidance* of any reminders of the traumatic experience.
 - Alterations to typical cognitive processes or to one's emotional state. An example would be the development of depression in the aftermath of a traumatic experience.
 - An inability to perform normal life tasks like caring For one's family or to perform job-related duties.
 - These symptoms are not caused by medical conditions or substance abuse.

Police need the support programs required by and HB 0088. Twenty-eight states already have police support programs and research shows that they have proven their value. Police need stress relief immediately. Passing this legislation this year will reduce pain and life disruption for police. It can save lives and enhance their mental health.

For 48 years I taught stress reduction to law enforcement and I still provide stress support services to them. I co-founded the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation and it wholeheartedly supports this legislation.

Police officers and their loved ones will benefit from the Police officer-Mental Health- Employee Assistance Programs. Peer support is vital to police officer survival and their mental health.

For These reasons, I ask for a FAVORABLE REPORT on HB 0088 / SB0074.

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