

**Testimony of Harford County Sheriff's Office Lieutenant Marc Junkerman in support of  
HB88 Police Officers-Mental Health-Employee Assistance Programs**

**January 2021**

My compliments to the distinguished committee Chair, honorable committee members, and interested ladies and gentlemen.

I am privileged to be starting my twenty-eighth year of continuous service as a sworn peace officer with the Harford County Sheriff's Office. I've had many assignments during my tenure but none so fulfilling as serving across the state and the nation as a public safety peer support and resiliency coordinator, trainer, and consultant for the past twelve years. I count myself fortunate to be a small contributor in the field of law enforcement wellness and I am truly heartened by how far we have come. That said, the passage of direct legislation within the State of Maryland encouraging further progress within this arena has been a missing component for far too long. It is for that reason I encourage you to support HB88.

On the surface, this bill serves as a natural extension of already mandated behavioral health for law enforcement by further requiring agencies to adopt and offer additional programs in which members can voluntarily engage. This is laudable but I believe the true impact is much larger and far reaching.

We often forget that sound mental health is not "stand-alone", nor does it occur in vacuum. On the contrary, psychological health is a direct result of a balanced mind, body, and spirit approach which incorporates tenants of physiological, emotional, and spiritual maintenance. This bill publicly recognizes the unique stressors suffered by the the law enforcement community but more importantly demands that members of the profession not only do the same but take direct action to mitigate the dysfunction which can result.

What could be more important during our current societal evolution in which we are deciding not only who we are but who we want to be?

How can we not realize that the service our citizens deserve will only come to fruition if our law enforcement members are allowed to recognize they too are people who live and work within the society they protect? That are more than an identification number, call sign on the radio, or faceless entity wearing a uniform. That they understand it is not the badge but the person wearing it who makes the difference which is why they were chosen in the first place.

How can we not recognize how imperative it is to help our public safety professionals re-affirm their oath and mission, take ownership for themselves, and be accountable to and for their peers on a daily basis?

How can we not as a society embrace the fact that fostering wellness and resilience within the ranks of our guardians is the only way to develop a culture which properly selects, trains, and sustains those individuals?

How can we not understand that the investments we make and partnerships we create on the front end will eventually pay huge dividends in creating the type of positive peace officer our members strive to be and which can bring pride to our communities.

To me, this bill is one more definitive step in making that vision a reality and I thank you for your consideration.

NOTHING FOLLOWS