

State of Maryland Department of State Police

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POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

DATE: March 25, 2021

BILL NUMBER: Senate Bill 74 Position: Support

BILL TITLE: Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021 – Employee

Assistance Programs and Early Intervention Programs

REVIEW AND ANALYSIS:

This legislation seeks to require all law enforcement agencies to develop and implement an early intervention system and employee assistance program for all police officers that the agency employs. The bill further provides that police agencies shall provide confidential mental health services to an employee at no cost to the employee.

Early intervention systems are designed to identify officer behavior and put steps in place to address it before circumstances escalate. If an officer's specific circumstances are not held in confidence, officers will refuse to take part in these programs. This legislation requires a voluntary health consultation and voluntary counseling services if an officer is involved in an incident involving an accident resulting in a fatality. In addition, a mandatory mental health consultation with voluntary counseling services are required if the officer is involved in an incident involving a serious injury to the police officer, an officer-involved shooting, or any use of force resulting in a fatality or serious injury.

The Maryland State Police (MSP) provides an employee assistance program that provides free confidential, mental health services. These services facilitate an officer's capacity to prepare for, recover from, and adapt to the mental, emotional, and physical effects caused by stress and adversity.

Law enforcement officers face extremely difficult circumstances daily. In addition to the stress faced by every person at home, they put their lives on the line to protect and serve others experiencing trauma when arriving at crash scenes; addressing incidents of domestic violence; investigating shootings and murders; searching for lost children and vulnerable adults. The cumulative exposure to stress experienced over years of service, depending upon individual coping skills and resiliency, may threaten the mental and physical well-being of an officer.

Senate Bill 74 prioritizes the mental health of police officers and seeks to reduce the negative stigma of seeking mental health services commonly experienced by members of law enforcement.

For these reasons, the Department urges the Committee to give Senate Bill 74 a favorable report.