



State of Maryland

**Maryland
Institute for
Emergency Medical
Services Systems**

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**HB 581 – Public Safety –
Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities –
Peer Support Programs**

MIEMSS Position: Support with Amendments

Bill Summary: HB 581: 1) establishes confidentiality requirements for peer support counseling programs for fire, rescue or emergency medical services (EMS) entities; 2) prohibits disclosure of the contents of written or oral communications regarding a peer counseling session except in certain circumstances; and 3) requires the Behavioral Health Administration to report on best practices and professional standards for peer support counseling programs on or before October 1, 2024.

Rationale:

- Peer Support Programs provide voluntary access to individual and group support from peers and mental health professionals, and provide emotional, informational and social support to the first responder community. These Programs can also mitigate adverse psychological effects resulting from events experienced by emergency response personnel.
- Peer Support Programs help emergency responders deal not only with normal human reactions to everyday stresses, but also those these personnel face following abnormal and traumatic events experienced on the job, e.g., line of duty deaths, multiple casualty incidents and other distressing situations. Peer Support programs are an important component of maintaining the psychological well-being of emergency personnel.
- Confidentiality is a key tenet of Peer Support Programs that helps participants feel safe in sharing experiences and concerns and ensures that personal information is kept private.
- MIEMSS convened an “Emergency Services Personnel Health and Wellness Workgroup” in 2019 to identify best practices and effective strategies for health, wellness, resiliency and post-critical incident services for the emergency response community. Workgroup participants include representatives from fire, EMS, law enforcement, and 9-1-1 center dispatch personnel.
- MIEMSS is offering an amendment (see below) that would charge MIEMSS, instead of the Behavioral Health Administration, with the responsibility for completing the required report on best practices and professional standards for Peer Support Programs. MIEMSS would incorporate the efforts of the Emergency Services Personnel Health and Wellness Workgroup in developing the report.

MIEMSS supports HB 581 with amendment and urges a favorable report.

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 3, in line 6 and 7, strike “**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADMINISTRATION**” and substitute “**MARYLAND INSTITUTE FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES SYSTEMS**”.