



February 3, 2022

The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass  
House Health & Government Operations Committee  
House Office Building – Room 241  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – House Bill 581: Public Safety - Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities - Peer Support Programs

Dear Chairman Pendergrass and Honorable Members of the Committees:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPW/WPS supports House Bill 581: Public Safety - Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities - Peer Support Programs (HB 581). Suicide, depression, and PTSD have long plagued first responders. Unfortunately, these first responders are more likely to die of suicide than the general public. Those who serve as fire, rescue, or emergency medical services professionals link the crisis to the horrific calls they encounter on the job. The pandemic has only worsened the problem, with first responders tending to the sickest COVID-19 patients at the risk of catching the virus themselves and taking it home to their families.

Peer support is a beneficial strategy to deal with the daily work-related stress that fire, rescue, or emergency medical services professionals encounter. HB 581 wisely increases the standards for peer support through training while at the same time requiring confidentiality. HB 581, if codified, will undoubtedly improve access and quality of care at the same time for those who utilize peer support counseling.

MPS/WPS, therefore, ask this committee for a favorable report on HB 581. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at [tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com](mailto:tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com).

Respectfully submitted,  
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society  
Legislative Action Committee