

PFFMD Testimony - SB446 - J. Buddle (2022).pdf

Uploaded by: Jeffrey Buddle

Position: FAV

PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS OF MARYLAND



February 16, 2022

Senator William C Smith, Jr., Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Testimony Concerning SB446, an Act concerning – Public Safety – Fire, Rescue or Emergency Services Entities – Peer Support

Submitted to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: Favorable

On behalf of the Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland, we submit this testimony in support of Maryland Senate Bill 446, introduced by Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, an Act concerning – Public Safety – Fire, Rescue or Emergency Services Entities – Peer Support.

The Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland (PFFMD) serves as the statewide affiliate of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF). Our membership includes local affiliates of the IAFF at the federal, state and local level which, combined, represent over 12,000 active and retired fire, rescue, and emergency services personnel.

The need for mental health resources in the fire, rescue, and emergency medical profession is on the rise. Each and every day our frontline heroes are exposed to the most unimaginable of circumstances. Over time this takes a toll on the mental health of our first responders.

The International Association of Fire Fighters working in conjunction with our local IAFF affiliates successfully developed and implemented “peer support” programs around the United States, including, here in the State of Maryland. While implementing this critical program the most common issue we heard from our members was the confidentiality of the process. This legislation would ensure that any member reaching out to a peer support counselor for assistance can do so with the assurance of State law that those conversations will be kept confidential. The peace of mind that goes along when reaching out for help without the fear of reprisal from an employer or the stigma of seeking mental health services is immeasurable.

Thank you for your attention to this critical piece of legislation and the positive impact it will have on the mental health services to our fire fighters and emergency medical services members across the State of Maryland. We strongly support Senate Bill 446 and urge the committee to give this important legislation a favorable report.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Buddle, President
Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland

The membership of the Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland includes 25 local IAFF affiliates from the following jurisdictions:

Federal: Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Fort George G. Meade, National Capital Federal Fire Fighters.

State: Baltimore / Washington International Airport, Martin State Airport.

Local: Annapolis, Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City (2 affiliates), Baltimore County, Carroll County, Cecil County, Charles County, Cumberland, Frederick County, Garrett County, Hagerstown, Howard County, Montgomery County, Ocean City, Prince Georges County, Queen Annes County, Salisbury, Talbot County, Worchester County.

SB446 testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Robert Phillips

Position: FAV

MARYLAND STATE FIREMEN'S ASSOCIATION

REPRESENTING THE VOLUNTEER FIRE, RESCUE, AND EMS PERSONNEL OF MARYLAND.



Robert P. Phillips

Chairman

Legislative Committee

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SB 446 Public Safety – Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities – Peer Support Programs

My name is Robert Phillips and I am the Legislative Committee Chairman for the Maryland State Firefighter's Association (MSFA).

I wish to present testimony in favor of **Senate Bill 446: Public Safety – Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities – Peer Support Programs**

This legislation will provide peer assistance to first responders who are facing personal issues. It also provides protections for the first responder and peer support provider that the conversations between them are confidential in nature and not subject to inquiry by others. This will further put at ease a first responder who is in need of peer support.

I thank the committee for their time on this important issue and ask that you favorably support Senate Bill 446..

Thank you and I'd be glad to answer questions that you might have.

SB 446 - Support - MPS WPS.pdf

Uploaded by: Thomas Tompsett

Position: FAV



February 3, 2022

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – Senate Bill 446: Public Safety - Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities - Peer Support Programs

Dear Chairman Smith 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 Senate Bill 446: Public Safety - Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities - Peer Support Programs (SB 446). 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. SB 446 wisely increases the standards for peer support through training while at the same time requiring confidentiality. SB 446, 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 SB 446. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

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

SB 446_Public Safety_Fire, Rescue or EMS_Peer Sup

Uploaded by: Theodore Delbridge

Position: FWA



State of Maryland

**Maryland
Institute for
Emergency Medical
Services Systems**

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**SB 446 – Public Safety –
Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities –
Peer Support Programs**

MIEMSS Position: Support with Amendments

Bill Summary: SB 446: 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 SB 446 with amendment and urges a favorable report.

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 3, in line 7 and 8, strike “**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADMINISTRATION**” and substitute “**MARYLAND INSTITUTE FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES SYSTEMS**”.

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Uploaded by: Heather Shek

Position: INFO



Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Dennis R. Schrader, Secretary

February 16, 2022

The Honorable William C. Smith
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 446 – Public Safety - Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities - Peer Support Programs – Letter of Information with Amendments

Dear Chair Smith and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) respectfully submits this letter of information with amendments on Senate Bill (SB) 446 – Public Safety - Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities - Peer Support Programs. SB 446 requires the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) within MDH to issue a report on certain best practices relating to peer support counseling for fire, rescue, or emergency medical services entities.

The report required under SB 446 would be better suited for the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS), rather than BHA. MIEMSS oversees and coordinates all components of the statewide emergency medical services (EMS) system. Among its many duties, MIEMSS provides leadership and medical direction, conducts and supports EMS educational programs and participates in EMS-related public education and prevention programs.

MIEMSS staff are the experts in best practices relating to peer support counseling that will support fire, rescue, and emergency medical services. For these reasons, MDH respectfully requests an amendment that changes the administration responsible for the report from BHA to MIEMSS. MDH coordinated with MIEMSS on this amendment and MIEMSS supports this change.

If you have any questions, please contact Heather Shek, Director of Governmental Affairs, at heather.shek@maryland.gov or (443) 695-4218.

Sincerely,

Dennis R. Schrader
Secretary

On page 3, in line 7 and 8, strike “**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADMINISTRATION**” and substitute “**MARYLAND INSTITUTE FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES SYSTEMS**”.