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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

March 30, 2023

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
Room 121, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 527 – Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities - Peer Support Programs – Letter of Support

Dear Chair Barnes and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) respectfully submits this letter of support for Senate Bill (SB) 527 – Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities - Peer Support Programs. SB 527 alters the definition of a peer support counseling program.

In 2022, House Bill 466 (2022) - Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities - Peer Support Programs, established the Peer Support Counseling Program (Program) to provide counseling services from a peer support specialist to members of a fire, rescue, or emergency medical services entity. Health-General Article § 7.5–101 defines peer support services as “a set of nonclinical activities provided by individuals in recovery from mental disorders, substance-related disorders, or addictive disorders who use their personal, lived experiences and training to support other individuals with mental disorders, substance-related disorders, or addictive disorders from a peer support specialist.”¹ MDH supports altering the definition of “peer support counseling program,” specifically removing the term “counseling,” to appropriately and accurately reflect the program’s intended purpose.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Megan Peters, Acting Director of Governmental Affairs at megan.peters@maryland.gov or (410) 260-3190.

Sincerely,

Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary

¹Md. Health-General Code Ann. § 7.5-101

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State of Maryland
Maryland Institute *for* Emergency Medical Services Systems

Wes Moore
Governor

Clay B. Stamp
Chairman, EMS Board

Theodore R. Delbridge, MD, MPH
Executive Director

Senate Bill 527
Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities –
Peer Support Programs

MIEMSS Position: Support

Bill Summary: SB 527 clarifies statutory language pertaining to peer support programs for fire, rescue and emergency medical services (EMS). The clarifications are important to accurately reflect work that is underway to report on best practices and professional standards for these programs.

Rationale:

- Peer Support programs are an important component of maintaining the psychological well-being of emergency response personnel.
- 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.
- Chapter 151 of the 2022 Session tasked the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) to report on best practices and professional standards for peer support programs, including guidelines for establishing and operating peer support programs; training and certifying peer support specialists; and other important program components.
- BHA has convened a workgroup – the Maryland Alliance for Public Safety Support – that is comprised of personnel from across the public safety spectrum with expertise in peer support programs. The report is due on or before October 1, 2024.
- SB 527 clarifies language to reflect accurately the collaborative work that is underway to meet the statutory intent.

MIEMSS Supports SB 527 and asks for a Favorable Report