

Good afternoon, Chairman Feldman and, members of the committee.

My name is Stephen Mizell and, I am speaking to you today to urge a favorable report with an amendment to Senator Carozza's Bill, SB 823.

I am a retired firefighter/EMT-B from the City of Salisbury with 24 years in the fire service.

As you can imagine, during my 24 years as a firefighter, I have seen gruesome things.

Time went by, and I keep these traumatic events to myself because I didn't want to be seen as weak.

As a result, my mental health suffered.

Over the years, I have been diagnosed with anxiety, depression, and alcoholism.

Following my retirement, I was diagnosed with PTSD.

Now, here is the good news.

Anxiety, depression, alcoholism, and PTSD are treatable

I quit drinking in 2017.

In January of 2022 I found a therapist who specializes in helping law enforcement officers and first responders and that has been a tremendous help.

One of the recommendations that I received from my therapist was to spend more time outdoors.

I will use the remainder of my time explaining how this has helped me and could benefit others.

I do not handle being in large, noisy crowds very well.

Last year, I explored Assateague State Park for the first time.

I found that Assateague was large enough that overcrowding usually was not an issue and the noise levels did not bother me.

In fact, I did not experience any noticeable anxiety at all.

Another added benefit to visiting Assateague was my wife and I had a peaceful place where we could spend time together. This helped us reconnect with each other and improved our marriage.

Finally, the time spent outdoors in the sun, sand and water greatly improved my mood.

There are many components involved in improving the mental health of law enforcement officers and first responders and spending time in nature is just one of them

Allowing law enforcement officers and first responders to obtain an Annual State Park Pass at a discounted rate would help remove a barrier to a resource that could improve their mental health.

As I just said, I was diagnosed as having PTSD after I retired.

Please add retired law enforcement officers and first responders to the bill's language so they also will be included.

Once again, I urge a favorable report with this amendment to Senator Carozza's Bill, SB 823.

Thank you for your time.



