

SENATOR JEFF WALDSTREICHER
Legislative District 18
Montgomery County

—
Vice Chair
Judicial Proceedings Committee

—
Joint Committee on Federal Relations



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The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Jeff Waldstreicher
Senate Bill 527 – Fire, Rescue, or Emergency Medical Services Entities – Peer Support Programs

March 1, 2023

Chairman Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

Last session, we passed legislation establishing free, confidential peer support programs for our first responders. Under that bill, the Behavioral Health Administration—in consultation with the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems and the Professional Fire Fighters of Maryland—was tasked with developing a report on best practices and professional standards for peer support programs.

As the stakeholders met to develop this report, a concern was raised about the wording of last year’s bill. Specifically, last year’s legislation makes reference to “peer counseling” and “peer counselors.” We meant counselor in the colloquial sense, with a small “c.” In Maryland, however, “counselor” has a specific legal definition, and is practiced by specific licensed professions. In essence, the law is being interpreted as if it had a capital “C.” Senate Bill 527 is a technical fix to this issue, clearing things by altering the term “peer support counseling program” to instead be “peer support program.”

Our first responders risk their lives for Maryland families every day. These heroes deserve quality, no-cost, evidenced-based mental health services to cope with the traumatic experiences they regularly encounter in the line of duty. I respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 527.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Waldstreicher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "J" and "W".

Senator Jeff Waldstreicher