



GREATER WASHINGTON  
Board of Trade

SB470– Growing Apprenticeships in Public Safety Act  
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Position: **FAVORABLE**  
Greater Washington Board of Trade  
February 8th, 2024

Dear Chairman Smith and Committee Members,

The Greater Washington Board of Trade is a pro-business and non-partisan organization supporting all industry sectors in the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia, having done so for the last 134 years. We support SB470.

This legislation addresses some of the key issues with hiring and retention of law enforcement professionals by expanding the apprenticeship program, making the apprenticeship model a much more viable path toward joining the police force, and establishing much needed officer wellness programs which are available to officers.

Public safety professionals undergo extreme stress with, at present, very little mental wellness support, with outcomes that, while not surprising, are deeply concerning. In a recent survey by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, officers reported much higher rates of depression, burnout, PTSD, and anxiety than the general population. Almost 25% of officers reported having experienced suicidal ideations and suicide, in fact, does claim more lives of police officers than are lost in the line of duty.

Mental healthcare, even when available through more traditional pathways, is often foregone. According to an anonymous survey of 400 officers, many are not able to recognize the signs of mental health issues, many have concerns regarding confidentiality, many believe that mental health professionals cannot relate to those working in law enforcement, and many believe that seeking mental health services are unfit to serve as officers in the criminal justice system.

The implementation of peer support programs, incorporation of stress management techniques into training, and offering of psychological programming to help officers recognize the signs of mental health concerns and to help them manage stress, especially when approached from a responsibly data centered angle, will go a long way toward ameliorating these major problems, saving the lives of many officers, and allowing them to serve the community for much longer.

Further, the broadening of the range of career options within the public safety professions available to apprentices will provide much needed staffing relief for the entire force and may serve not only to better relations between communities and the public safety professionals that serve them but, over the long term, may serve to make public safety cohorts more closely resemble their communities.

As crime and public safety continue to become more of a regional concern, the Greater Washington Board of Trade and broader regional business community strongly support measures to improve the public safety community. Please support SB470.