



GREATER WASHINGTON
Board of Trade

HB597 – Growing Apprenticeships in Public Safety Act
House Judiciary Committee
Position: **FAVORABLE**
Greater Washington Board of Trade
February 2nd, 2024

Dear Chairman Clippinger 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 HB597.

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 police departments, and establishing much needed officer wellness programs.

Public safety professionals undergo extreme stress often with little mental wellness support. 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. It is alarming to note that more police officer lives are lost due to suicide than in the line of duty.

According to an anonymous survey of 400 officers, mental health services are often not utilized because many officers 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 might render them 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 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.

This legislation has the potential to substantially improve acquisition and retention of the public safety workforce while substantially improving performance and community fit over time. Especially as crime

and public safety continues 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 HB597.