

Sheriff



Sheriff Michael A. Lewis Wicomico County Maryland

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February 21, 2025

The Honorable Luke Clippinger, Chairman
House Judiciary Committee
101 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: House Bill 309 – Public Safety – Law Enforcement Peer Support Confidentiality - Support
Chairman Clippinger,

My name is Jessica Murphy and I am a Lieutenant with the Wicomico County Sheriff's Office assigned to the Field Operations Bureau. I am also an Executive Board Member of the Fraternal Order of Police Maryland State Lodge, and co-founder of Behind the Line Inc., a 501c3 not for profit offering wrap around mental health and wellness services including peer support to first responders, the military, and their families.

I am writing in support of House Bill 309, which allows for confidential peer support services for law enforcement officers. As a deputy sheriff for twenty six years and a paramedic in the fire service for thirty years, I know how important confidential peer support is for combatting post-traumatic stress. As I have been saying for many years our police officers, like our brothers and sisters in the fire service, need the ability to confide in their peers as a means of maintaining wellness and preventing suicide. According to bluehelp.org, 712 police officers have completed suicide since 2020. To say we have a problem is an understatement.

In addition, a law enforcement peer support study conducted in Colorado surveyed 631 police officers in 2018. The study reported, "48.3% participated in peer support services and over half who participated stated the support directly or indirectly helped them perform their duties and/or improved their home life"¹. We know peer support works, but it is only good if the officers trust and access the support.

¹ Digliani, J.A., *Peer Support Team Utilization and Outcome Survey Report*, March 2018, https://www.jackdigliani.com/uploads/3/4/5/1/34518973/peer_support_team_survey_report.pdf

Laws providing confidentiality in peer support have existed for many years in other places and are known to increase recipients confidence in their privacy making it more likely officers will access services. Providing a favorable report for House Bill 309 is needed to ensure officers will access those services and provide an incentive for law enforcement agencies who do not have robust mental health and wellness programs due to a lack of confidence in those services. Making wellness programs mandatory is only one piece of a good start. The other piece is to provide a setting where officers feel safe and trust the process. For these reasons and many more I ask you to provide a favorable report for House Bill 309. You will be saving lives by doing so.

Sincerely,

Lt. Jessica M. Murphy

Lt. Jessica M. Murphy, EdD
Wicomico County Sheriff's Office