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The Honorable Luke H. Clippinger, Esq., Chairman
House Judiciary Committee
Taylor House Office Building, Room 101
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD, 2140

Re: House Bill 309 – Public Safety – Law Enforcement Agencies – Peer Support Programs

Chairman Clippinger,

I fully support HB 309. I am a 24-year veteran of the Baltimore County Police Department, an Army veteran, and currently serve as the Peer Support and Wellness Manager, helping over 2,000 sworn and professional staff members with their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

Research in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* shows that law enforcement officers face an average of 178 critical incidents in their careers—far more than the typical 2-4 incidents a person typically encounters in their lifetime, creating a serious mental health strain for officers during their careers if the proper support is not in place. Over the last several years, police reform has been a priority for the legislature. But in many cases, officers' unprofessional or illegal behaviors could have been prevented if the stigma surrounding mental health had proactively been addressed and proper support was available.

Unfortunately, too many officers are still afraid to seek help due to concerns about confidentiality. They fear their struggles will be leaked to leadership, lead to court testimony, or even be discovered by their family and colleagues. Confidentiality is key to helping those who are struggling, allowing trained peer team members to provide a safe and trusted space for disclosure. In addition, confidentiality does not hinder the mandatory reporting of immediate safety concerns, criminal activity, and abuse. Thus, confidentiality does not serve to conceal any improprieties that would negatively impact the community and profession.

House Bill 309 will provide the necessary confidentiality protections for peer support teams across Maryland, enabling officers to come forward in times of crisis without fear of exposure. This is crucial in encouraging officers to seek help, fostering a healthier, more supportive environment, and ultimately improving relationships between law enforcement and the community.

I want to thank Delegate Cardin for introducing this legislation and urge this committee to vote in favor of **HB 309** to support our officers and make a positive impact on their well-being and community safety.

Sgt. John Haddaway #4603
Baltimore County Police Department
Peer Support & Wellness Manager



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