

MCPA-MSA_ HB 309 Peer Support Program-Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Andrea Mansfield

Position: FAV



Maryland Chiefs of Police Association

Maryland Sheriffs' Association



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Luke Clippinger, Chair and
Members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Darren Popkin, Executive Director, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Andrea Mansfield, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Samira Jackson, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee

DATE: February 25, 2025

RE: **HB 309 – LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES – PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Chiefs of Police Association (MCPA) and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association (MSA) **SUPPORT HB 309**. This bill protects communication and affords certain confidentiality between law enforcement officers and their peer support counselling specialists.

Law enforcement officers face extremely difficult circumstances on the job every day. They put their lives on the line to protect and serve others, and can experience significant trauma when arriving at crash scenes; addressing incidents of domestic violence; investigating shootings and murders; and searching for lost children and vulnerable adults. This cumulative exposure to high-level stress, experienced over years of service, , can threaten the mental and physical well-being of officers, depending upon their individual coping skills and resiliency. It is important, and arguably necessary, that a safe space be created for officers to receive the help they need without fear of retaliation or intimate information being exposed.

HB 309 creates this essential environment and ensures law enforcement officers have access to high quality peer support. This support is an effective and early intervention means to address many mental health and occupational concerns that law enforcement officers face daily. This bill also ensures that information exchanged in peer support settings is held in confidence, and eliminates the potential of peer support specialists being compelled to testify in open court regarding the intimate details shared.

Forty states have or are in the process of approving similar legislation that will legally protect communications between law enforcement officers and their peer support counselling specialists. We hope Maryland will join these states.

This bill prioritizes the mental health of laws enforcement officers and allows them to seek the help they need with confidence. For these reasons, MCPA and MSA **SUPPORT HB 309** and urge a **FAVORABLE** committee report.

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HB309.pdf

Uploaded by: Ashley Clark

Position: FAV

MARYLAND PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY



January 27, 2025

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January 27, 2025

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

RE: Support – HB309: Public Safety - Law Enforcement Agencies - Peer Support Programs

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1100 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS/WPS support HB309 because it would allow peer support personnel to provide emotional and psychological support services to law enforcement professionals in a confidential manner while also allowing for disclosure of privileged information under certain circumstances. Police officers or other law enforcement professionals must be trained in peer support skills and educated about their obligations under the bill, thus raising practice requirements to those similarly required of licensed mental health professionals. Ensuring confidentiality will increase the likelihood that law enforcement professionals suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or depression will seek needed care.

For all the reasons stated above, MPS/WPS ask this committee for a favorable report on HB309. If you have any questions regarding this testimony, please contact Lisa Harris Jones at lisa.jones@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society Legislative Action Committee

Letter in Support of HB 309.pdf

Uploaded by: Dave Rose

Position: FAV



BALTIMORE COUNTY LODGE NO. 4
FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

INCORPORATED

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DAVID M. ROSE
LODGE PRESIDENT

DONNA M. PATTERSON
LODGE SECRETARY

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

Re: House Bill 309 - Public Safety - Law Enforcement Agencies - Peer Support Programs -Support
Chairman Clippinger,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 309, which aims to codify, with certain exceptions, the confidentiality of communications between law enforcement officers and peer support specialists. As a member of the Baltimore County Police Department, I have personally witnessed the profound impact that peer support networks have had in helping officers cope with the unique challenges and stressors associated with our profession.

In May 2018, following the tragic line-of-duty death of Officer Amy Caprio, our department began informal peer support meetings on the second floor of our lodge. These gatherings provided a vital space for officers to come together, grieve, and offer mutual support during an incredibly difficult time. Over the years, we recognized the need for a more formalized structure to ensure the well-being of our officers, and we have since established regular peer-to-peer meetings, often attended by members of our agency's peer counseling unit as well as mental health professionals from across the state and nation.

While these meetings have proven invaluable, one concern that has consistently been raised by our officers is the fear that their confidential communications may not be protected. Many officers are reluctant to speak freely about the personal and professional challenges they face, fearing that their words may be disclosed to management or others who do not need to know. The establishment of legal protections for confidential peer support communications, as outlined in HB 309, is essential in addressing this concern and ensuring that officers can engage in these critical conversations without fear of reprisal or breach of trust.

Currently, fire professionals in the state of Maryland are afforded the protection of confidentiality during peer support sessions. Law enforcement officers, however, do not have the same legal assurance. This bill would extend the same level of confidentiality to law enforcement officers, recognizing that we, too, are often exposed to traumatic incidents that require the same level of psychological support and care.

I respectfully urge you to vote in favor of HB 309 as written. This legislation will help foster a safer and more supportive environment for law enforcement officers, ultimately contributing to their mental health and overall effectiveness in serving our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Dave Rose
President
Baltimore County FOP Lodge #4

REPRESENTING THE PROFESSIONAL POLICE OFFICERS OF BALTIMORE COUNTY



Sponsor testimony

Uploaded by: Delegate Cardin Delegate Cardin

Position: FAV

JON S. CARDIN
Legislative District 11
Baltimore County

Judiciary Committee

Chair
Civil Law and Procedure
Subcommittee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 309

Public Safety - Law Enforcement Agencies - Peer Support Programs

Support

Currently, communications between fire professionals and peer support specialists are protected under Maryland law. However, law enforcement officers do not have the same legal assurances. HB 309 extends the same level of confidentiality to law enforcement. In doing so, the measure recognizes what is too often overlooked, law enforcement officers are regularly exposed to traumatic incidents that require the same level of psychological support and care.

HB 309 is one of the top-priorities of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) the organization that represents the professional police officers of Baltimore County and is of significant importance law enforcement throughout the state.

House Bill 309 Confidential Peer Support - Law Enf

Uploaded by: Jessica Murphy

Position: FAV

Sheriff



Sheriff Michael A. Lewis Wicomico County Maryland

401 NAYLOR MILL ROAD, SALISBURY, MD 21801 • 410-548-4891

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

Haddaway HB309 Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: John Haddaway

Position: FAV

ROBERT O. MCCULLOUGH

Chief of Police



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BALTIMORE COUNTY POLICE

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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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HB309 Written Testimony Greenbeck.pdf

Uploaded by: Kathryn Greenbeck

Position: FAV

ROBERT O. MCCULLOUGH

Chief of Police



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

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

Chairman Clippinger,

I am writing in strong support of House Bill 309, which will provide legal confidentiality to communications between police officers and their specially trained law enforcement peers.

The Baltimore County Police Department recognizes that the employees of our agency are its most valuable asset. Situations and demands specific to the field of law enforcement result in unique stressors and often trauma, which can cause both acute and cumulative stress reactions. These situations may be related to the employee's professional life, personal life, or both. Peer Support teams strive to assist first responders in crisis by mitigating the effects of all forms of stress to which our officers are routinely exposed, and to provide needed support and resources when they suffer the effects of traumatic critical incidents.

In wake of the devastating loss of Officer Amy Caprio in 2018, FOP Lodge 4 started a Peer-to-Peer support group to bolster the mental wellness of our first responders and dispatchers. Shortly thereafter, our Department created the Peer Support & Wellness Team (PSWT), which consists of two permanently assigned sworn police personnel, who coordinate a larger team of properly trained and recognized peers, who volunteer over and above their normal assignments to support their fellow employees who are experiencing the effects of one or more traumatic incidents. Our PSWT also supports all officers in our agency by providing guidance and access to programs that focus on officer safety, wellness, and resiliency via multiple platforms.

Peer Support and Wellness Team members, upon acceptance onto the Team, are provided with training and certification on basic individual and group counseling techniques endorsed by the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation.

Confidentiality is crucial to the success of any Peer Support program. Maryland law does not currently provide privilege for communications between police officers and their peers, but this is a vital component of an effective Peer Support program, particularly for law enforcement officers. HB309 will provide the same level confidentiality that is currently enjoyed by Maryland's fire fighters and I respectfully urge you to issue a favorable report on this bill, as written.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Lt. Kathryn Greenbeck
Baltimore County Police Department
Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge #4



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Maryland State Police Position Paper - HB0309.pdf

Uploaded by: Owen Traynor

Position: FAV



State of Maryland
Department of State Police
Government Affairs Unit
Annapolis Office (410) 260-6100

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

DATE: February 25, 2025

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 309 **POSITION:** Support

BILL TITLE: Public Safety – Law Enforcement Agencies – Peer Support Programs

REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

This legislation seeks to establish confidentiality requirements for peer support counseling programs for law enforcement agencies. With certain exceptions, this legislation prohibits a peer support program participant from disclosing the contents of written or oral communications regarding a peer support interaction.

Under current law, a person who discusses mental health issues with their doctor, psychiatrist or psychologist can expect that with certain limitations, their conversations and notes taken by the person are protected from disclosure. Generally, the exceptions to disclosure are threats of suicide, threats of imminent and serious bodily harm, or information relating to the abuse or neglect of a child.

Law enforcement professionals are under increased stress, have a higher risk of suicide, and patrol our streets in the most stressful situations while armed. When police officers are willing to seek help when struggling, the State must ensure that they are able to reach that help. Yet, law enforcement officers are likely to refuse assistance after critical incidents and for other life stressors (marital, financial, familial, professional) if they can be compelled to testify about what they and others say during these post-critical incident interventions. Without confidentiality protections, Peer Support Team Members also fear negative consequences from their interactions and interventions with coworkers.

House Bill 309 provides the necessary confidentiality protections for officers and their peers who would help them deal with the stress of critical incidents or other dangers to their mental health. Peer Support, including critical incident interventions, are not incident process oriented. Peer Support interactions are not policy & procedure after action reviews. Peer team communications do not supersede mandated reporting for serious criminal law violations, danger to self or others, any other mandatory reporting such as suspected child abuse or neglect.

Peer Support Programs offers assistance and appropriate support resources to employees when personal or professional problems negatively affect their work performance, family unit, or self and/or after critical incidents to provide psychoeducation and to mitigate traumatic stress reactions. House Bill 309 removes the stigma of worrying about what will happen to a law enforcement officer should they seek the help they need and deserve.

For these reasons, the Department of State Police urges the Committee to give House Bill 309 a favorable report.

HB0309-JUD_MACo_SWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Sarah Sample

Position: FWA



House Bill 309

Public Safety - Law Enforcement Agencies - Peer Support Programs

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judiciary Committee

WITH AMENDMENTS

Date: February 25, 2025

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS HB 309 WITH AMENDMENTS**. This bill promotes more stability within the public safety workforce across Maryland, where employers currently face historic challenges and vacancies. It does so by expanding opportunities for law enforcement officers to seek support from their peers when struggling with the mental and emotional impacts of working in public safety.

This bill establishes an additional avenue of support for law enforcement officers who might be experiencing serious mental and emotional distress but might not yet be emotionally ready to seek medical attention from a professional. Counties believe HB 309 takes a balanced approach by authorizing confidential peer-to-peer interactions but also ensuring transparency and accountability for serious crimes and during exigent circumstances. MACo commends this effort and offers an amendment to include corrections officers in the provisions of the bill as these professionals have a comparable risk of severe injury, trauma, and long-term adverse health effects.

Public safety is a profession where, rightfully, courage and composure are always necessary. At the same time, law enforcement and detention center officers can be the targets of violence, and are often exposed to grave harms inflicted on vulnerable populations and children. This exposure is well known to take a serious toll on the mental and emotional wellbeing of these fundamental public safety officials. Speaking to a supervisor or a trained medical professional about personal mental and emotional challenges and insecurities can be intimidating. Having an option to talk to a trained peer can serve as a comfortable entry point for an individual to heal and potentially seek more help if needed.

Not only can HB 309 fortify these employees in a way that supports better outcomes for the community, but it can also create a team environment that relies on prioritizing mental health, trust, and support. There is a great deal of crossover between the corrections and law enforcement workforces, which is why considering their needs together will make them both stronger independent agencies.

As the rehabilitative arm of the justice system, corrections officers look out for and care for some of Maryland's most vulnerable populations, and are routinely exposed to situations that are damaging for mental health and wellbeing. They need and deserve resources and support systems to care for them, too. For these reasons, MACo urges a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** for HB 309.