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Ladies and gentleman of the Interim Finance Committee

My name is Eric Romero, a yard investigator and Senior Correctional Officer for the Nevada Department of Corrections. April 15th will be my 11 year anniversary since I have started; all of which I have spent at High Desert State Prison. Prior to this I served in the United States Marine Corps as a machine gunner with a deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2010.

I come to you today to ask for your help. In the time I have worked for this department I have seen many staff come and go. Several officers leave for their own personal reasons, however I would say that most are a silent majority that leave due to high levels of stress which takes a heavy toll on their mental health. We leave our family's every day from the comforts of our homes and are put into an environment surrounded with violence. Then after the shift is over, we have to be able to flip a switch and reintegrate back with our family at home. The job never ends when you leave the gate, you take the PTSD and stresses of the job home with you which affects your entire family.

I've seen my fair share of violence working here which is up to and including inmates losing their lives and several officers being assaulted with deadly weapons. It is the toughest beat to walk; street cops I've talk to admit that they could never do my job and that I'm crazy for doing it.

The numbers don't lie. 80% of marriages in law enforcement end in divorce. Alcoholism is about double the national average and suicides rates are 8 times more likely. This compounded with a short life expectancy of a retired correctional officer due to heart conditions tied to the stresses of the job. I've known 2 officers who have unexpectedly passed away within their first year of retirement.

Most officers are never mentally prepared to deal with the rigors of prison life where you are surrounded by violent inmates. This is why I believe we need to have a peer support program for our department. The benefit of this program would serve invaluable to helping people navigate through life's hardships. By giving them a resource to turn to for assistance, we greatly enhance their ability to relieve pressure off their shoulders and reduce stress and anxiety. Make no mistake, this program will save lives.

Thank you