

Good morning Committee Chair and members of the Interim Finance Committee. I am Officer Michael Thompson with the Nevada Department of Corrections. I have been an Officer for almost ten years. I am the FOP Nevada CO Lodge 21 Vice-President. I work in concert with President Lunkwitz and have found my time to be both rewarding and eye opening. As the Vice-President and officer representative to every NDOC Officer in Nevada I find myself straddling the line between staff and administration with regards to contract and labor disputes. But my heart will always be team green. My brothers and sisters in the department come to me morning and night with both labor and personal issues. I am happy to be there for them in whatever capacity they need me to serve in.

The universal issues that I hear about and see in most of my brothers and sisters are frustration and despair. Frustration with the departments' lack of adequately trained and available mental health professionals, and a despair born from society's expectation that they are emotional robots trained to ignore the mental perils of our profession.

It is true that we chose this career. It is also true that we know the dangers. What we were not prepared for and do not know how to process is the fact that, once we enter that gatehouse, our level of vigilance rises exponentially. As a former EMT let me break it down for you:

The sympathetic nervous system originates in the spinal cord and its main function is to activate the arousal responses that occur during the fight-or-flight response. The sympathetic nervous system transfers signals from the dorsal hypothalamus, which activates the heart, increases vascular resistance, and increases blood flow, especially to the muscle, heart, and brain tissues. It activates the adrenal medulla, releasing catecholamines that amplify the sympathetic response. Additionally, this component of the autonomic nervous system utilizes and activates the release of norepinephrine by the adrenal glands in the reaction. Norepinephrine is a tool in the belt of your average person. It is not, however, meant to be released all day long.

Simply put, the general function of norepinephrine is to mobilize the brain and body for action. Health conditions that result from prolonged, high levels of norepinephrine include a greater risk of high blood pressure(hypertension), cardiac issues and kidney damage. To compound these problems many

Officers self-medicate with alcohol and drugs as a result of both the mental and physical trauma they suffer throughout their careers.

My wife jokes with me every day to, "Keep your head on a swivel honey." That's largely how we deal with the mental stressors of the job - humor. As I enter my early fifties I look back on a life of pushing my stressors down and my career has only compounded that problem.

We can overcome the stigma of asking for help but we need a mechanism in place to assist Officers willing to seek that help. On behalf of all our FOP Members and Officers throughout Nevada, I request your partnership in approving funding to build a successful peer support program. When you hold your vote please understand that what you decide on April 11th will impact the lives and families of our officers in the future. I truly hope that you will vote to save the lives of those officers who give their lives to serve you and the public. Thank you for your careful consideration.

Best regards,

Michael A. Thompson

Vice-President

FOP NV CO Lodge 21

