



April 10, 2024

To: Committee Chair and Interim Finance Committee

Members,

Please accept this letter of support for funding of the NV Law Enforcement Peer Support program.'

In Massachusetts where I am located, we have a robust Peer Support program. Here we have what is known as the MA State Peer Support Network. This volunteer group, overseen by the MA Fire Academy, has been in place since 2000. I have had the honor of serving as the Training Director for this unit for 15 years. The standard of care that we adopted is that of the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) in MD. Funding for operational and training expenses come from the State.

Under this model every city and town in MA has a regional team assigned to it that provides free crisis intervention services to any uniformed person and their families. The teams vary from multi-jurisdictional (such as the one that I co-direct), law enforcement specific, telecommunicators, department of corrections, fire and law enforcement Chaplains, and a family support unit. We also have a residential non-profit trauma and addiction treatment program that has been in existence for 32 years, the On-Site Academy, that serves only uniformed personnel and their families. I have been affiliated with this facility as a Peer and Clinician for 21 years. Any firefighter or law enforcement person is eligible to attend our treatment programs at no cost.

We are based under the Fire Academy as when we were created the State Fire Marshall was the only person who accepted the challenge from our Executive Office of Public Safety to lead the program, despite being offered to others including law enforcement. In taking the lead the then Marshall committed to serving any uniformed person, including law enforcement. That tradition continues today with the support of our current Marshall.

I have seen the benefits of having a Public Safety Peer support / Crisis Intervention program up close. I am currently in my 42<sup>nd</sup> year of public safety work having served as a Police Lt., Paramedic, and Firefighter during my career. I also have my credentials as a licensed clinician (LICSW) that I use supporting public safety. In addition, I hold a faculty position with the ICISF

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since 2007 and in that role, I get to travel the country and other countries to provide education on crisis intervention and peer support. I hold many advisory positions to public safety agencies in these areas and public safety wellness in general.

I share my background as what I have done and get to do lets me see first-hand the benefits of peer support and crisis intervention. At the beginning of my career peer support was taking a colleague to a bar for drinks after a bad event. Officers engaged in an assortment of maladaptive coping mechanisms. If one had a challenge with a call, they were deemed weak and stigmatized. No. one would dare to consider seeking any form of mental health or emotional support as it could be career ending.

Today, the culture has changed. When I ask law enforcement personnel about how they cope with stress many freely admit to using peer support and even having a therapist. These admissions even happen in front of colleagues during training. It has become a standard of care within the law enforcement world to have access to these services. The younger generation actively seeks out these services. More seasoned officers have also sought out these services once they've experience them and realized that most times it simply involves talking in a confidential setting to someone who has worn the uniform, had some challenges, and received help to get to a better place. In fact, many of these officers at the conclusion of a session are irate that these types of resources haven't been there throughout their career.

In conclusion, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of funding this project. Establishing a system that is recognized by the law enforcement community will increase utilization rates as compared to sending them to a clinician directly. From the perspective of morale, it is seen as the state caring for their wellbeing and not being on an island. A well cared for officer will be in a better place to provide better services to the community.

From a graver standpoint, what is the cost of losing a 15-year law enforcement officer to stress or worse, suicide? What is the cost to replace that officer and how much money was put into that person from recruitment, training, and salary? What's the cost of losing 15 years of experience? What would be the impact on the department? Community? Family? I believe that the cost of funding this project will be lower than the costs associated with what I have just described.

Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me. I may best be reached by email at: [REDACTED], or by cell at [REDACTED].

Thank you for allowing me to assist in your decision.

Respectfully submitted,



Tom Greenhalgh  
Executive Director

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