

April 09, 2024

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in support for additional funding to NV FOP Lodge 23 Peer Support program. My name is Sarah Paryga. I am a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner. I have worked in mental health since 2008 in various settings but the majority of my career has been in corrections between the county jail and state prisons. I have extensive first-hand knowledge of what happens behind those walls.

People often ask me “what’s the craziest thing you’ve ever seen while working in corrections!?” and my answer is always that I can’t answer that. The craziest thing THEY have ever seen is a Tuesday for me. I, personally, have done CPR on an offender who was stabbed by his cellmate, attempted (unsuccessfully unfortunately) revival on a suicide by hanging, tended to injuries on staff, and participated in critical incident debriefings after major events.

In addition to my personal employment history in corrections, my husband is a correctional officer. Every single day, I watch my husband get ready for work, put on his uniform, stab vest, duty belt, and walk out the door. I have no idea what’s in store for him on any given day. The general population always wants to remove criminals from society. Our correctional officers are the ones who are overseeing those that have been removed from the public. Our officers respond to riots, witness murders, cut offenders down from hangings, get exposed to deadly substances, and a myriad of other horrific scenes including attacks on them. Our officers get hit, punched, bit, spit on, and stabbed. They deal with some of the most unpredictable and violent offenders that are incarcerated in our state. Afterwards, they are expected to go back to work as if nothing happened. There is no one there for them. There is no one to help them process what just occurred. These events are difficult to take home to your family especially if they have never been involved in this type of work. It can be scary to hear and frighten your family. This is not a “normal” profession by any means. Correctional officers experience PTSD at the same rate if not higher than police officers and military members.

Since FOP took over at NDOC, I have voluntarily made myself available to talk to officers after critical incidents but I can only do so much. I am one person who works a full-time job and takes care of a family. I am limited in availability. I have not been able to get as involved

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as I would like to be. Adding peer support is brilliant and has been shown to improve mental health outcomes across the board in every program that has ever instituted peer support. The VA has peer support and I can't say enough good things about that program. There are a multitude of studies available to back up my claims as well.

FOP is the largest law enforcement union in the country. They are well respected and known for supporting their members in every way possible. This is an organization for law enforcement run by law enforcement. They step up every single day to help their brothers and sisters do better and be better. A peer support network will tremendously enhance quality of life for our officers and provide better outcomes after critical incidents. Employees who know they have support in their organizations do a better job and are more motivated to help others as well.

I thank you for your time and attention in this matter. Mental health is very important to me. I have made improving lives my mission in life. This is yet another step forwards towards ending the negative stigma attached to mental health care.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Paryga". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sarah" and last name "Paryga" clearly distinguishable.

Sarah Paryga