



February 20, 2020

The Honorable Senator William C. Smith, Jr
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support– SB 565: Police Officers – Mental Health – Employee Assistance Programs

Dear Chairman Smith and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) is a state medical organization whose physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, MPS works to ensure available, accessible and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strives through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branch of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland excluding the D.C. suburbs, MPS represents over 700 psychiatrists as well as physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS supports Senate Bill 565 (SB 565), because 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.

In 2014, President Obama ordered the creation of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing to identify best practices and provide recommendations on effectively reducing crime and increasing public trust in police. One of the task force’s six identified pillars was officer safety and wellness, which emphasized that “the wellness and safety of law enforcement is critical not only to themselves, their colleagues, and their agencies, but also to public safety.”¹ The taskforce defined wellness as including not only physical health but also mental health and resilience and noted that the “culture” of law enforcement can be prohibitive in officers seeking mental health treatment that they need. Similarly, in his August 2015 address, the then president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police emphasized, “We cannot forget about ourselves and our colleagues . .

¹ President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, at 61 (2015).



. if we don't make it a priority to keep ourselves healthy . . . we won't be able to protect our communities or our fellow officers"²

For all the reasons above, MPS asks the committee for an unfavorable report of SB 454. If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Legislative Action Committee for the Maryland Psychiatric Society

² Richard Beary, "Priority One: Officer Safety and Wellness," President's Message, *The Police Chief* 82 (August 2015): 6.