

**Written Testimony of Lieutenant Marc Junkerman, Harford County Sheriff's
Office, in support of SB565
February 20, 2020**

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and committee members, I bring you greetings and humbly thank you for the honor of testifying before this distinguished body.

I have spent my entire adult life in service, first as a soldier and then as a Maryland law enforcement professional for the past 26 years. For over a decade, I have had the privilege to serve as a trainer, consultant, and advocate for public safety wellness and resilience within our state and now across our nation. It is my belief that creating a public safety culture of wellness is one of our most urgent challenges. That is why I will continue to champion the cause both professionally and personally.

Today you will hear from lauded experts in the field whose credentials and reputation far exceed mine. Their testimony in support of this bill will illustrate the need for enhanced services within this arena in no uncertain terms. They will provide empirical and anecdotal data which shows the impact of stress on our law enforcement providers and its resulting aftermath. They will present a body of evidence in a manner which far surpasses my skills. In response, I will not add to that body of knowledge but instead address my remarks to a specific individual, Deputy Recruit Marc Junkerman. Here's what I would say if could sit across from myself all those many years ago and the advice I would lend to that young man just starting his career...

I would tell him that he will witness an evolution in society which will require our profession to adapt and change for the better. A society which demands we continue to evolve from good police officers into even better peace officers who serve as problem solvers and positive agents for change within the communities they serve. I would tell him that these changes will not be easy but are so necessary for us to have the ability to view our citizens as actual people with whom we should partner. But then I would have to be honest and tell him we as profession and society will fail him in this endeavor because of a haunting truth which remains. You see, he will never view the citizens he serves as people until we as a society and profession let him view himself as person and not just a badge number or agency patch.

I would tell him how much it hurt me to see us select the best possible people to serve as law enforcement professionals and then train and indoctrinate them into a culture which demands they never fail or show emotion except for maybe anger. That we demand they put everyone else first and choke down their own doubts and misgivings. Who work for a society which prudently has them respond to substance abuse and mental health crisis with Narcan and diversion instead of handcuffs yet still requires them view themselves as superhuman and impregnable. Which demands they simply absorb and stifle the ugly side of life which they experience because asking for help in their world is a sign of weakness.

I would tell him that this inability to emote will seriously wound him. That he will make poor choices in his struggles to define himself which will lead to isolation, self-deprecation, and self-medication. And that because of his choice of behavior, he and his family will suffer.

But then I would tell him not to worry. That he would find partners, and friends, and people who cared which would help him to recognize destructive path he was forging and to instead choose a positive one. I would show him the physical, psychological, and emotional scars and tell him that the wounds were deep but did heal. That the scars were reminders of his resilience not his suffering or failings. And that while he was a work in progress, he truly believes that he will thrive as professional and as a person because he sought help.

I would tell him the road will be hard but one which he can navigate if he simply commits to a defining purpose, takes ownership for himself, and remains accountable to and for his peers. And I would make a few simple request of that young me. I would ask him to learn these lessons early and not to wait two decades to realize that the strongest and smartest are the ones who can admit they need help when they feel weak or overmatched. I would ask him to not lose himself in the roar of this world and to remain a person wearing a badge and not a just a badge wearing a person. And finally, I would tell him that if he works everyday to simply be a better person, he will without a doubt become a better police officer.

It is for these reasons I urge your support on SB565.