

Testimony in Support of SB 565/HB736 Police officers – Mental Health- Employee Assistance Programs

Good Afternoon Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and committee members:

Suicide, Line-of-Duty Deaths and Police Stressors

- 228 police officers in the USA took their own lives.
 - 7 of them were officers from Maryland.
 - Police suicides exceed line-of-duty deaths. 228/134
 - Suicides and deaths impact law enforcement mental health.
 - There are innumerable stressors in police work.
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| - Infant fatalities | - Injuries to children |
| - Cases of child abuse and neglect | - Abandoned children |
| - Disaster response | - Elder abuse |
| - Intervening in violence episodes | - Sexual assaults |
| - Murders | - Auto accidents |
| - Robberies | - On the job injuries |
| - Working alone | - Shift work |
| - Disruption to family life | - Threats against one's person |
| - Some unsupportive leaders | - Negative public attitudes |

Stress Effects in Law Enforcement Personnel

- The stronger the stimulus, the greater the stress.
- Stress can be short or long term
- Traumatic stress has the strongest psychological impact on law enforcement personnel particularly: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:
 - Significant symptoms lasting longer than 30 days.
 - Intense psychological *arousal* to stimuli reminding a person about the traumatic event.
 - *Intrusive memories*, which are unbidden thoughts and images that flood a person's mind in the aftermath of a serious traumatic event.

- *Avoidance* of any reminders of the traumatic experience.

- Alterations to typical cognitive processes or to one's emotional state. An example would be the development of depression in the aftermath of a traumatic experience.

- An inability to perform normal life tasks like caring for one's family or to perform job related duties.

Police need the support programs required by HB 736 and SB 565. Twenty eight states already have police support programs and research shows that they have proven their value. Police need stress relief immediately. Passing this legislation this year will reduce pain and life disruption for police. It can save lives and enhance their mental health.

For 48 years I taught stress reduction to law enforcement and I still provide stress support services to them. I co-founded the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation and it wholeheartedly supports this legislation.

Police officers and their loved ones will benefit from the Police officer-Mental Health- Employee Assistance Programs. Peer support is vital to police officer survival and their mental health.

For These reasons, I ask for a FAVORABLE REPORT on SB 565 / HB 736.

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