



ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG ABUSE ADVISORY COUNCIL

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 565
POLICE OFFICERS - MENTAL HEALTH – EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Submitted by the Montgomery County Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council
to the Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 20, 2020

Mr. Chairman and Respected Committee Members:

The Montgomery County Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council (AODAAC) strongly urges you to pass *SB0565 Police Officers – Mental Health – Employee Assistance Programs*. AODAAC provides guidance to the County Executive and County Council for Montgomery County by identifying alcohol and other drug prevention and treatment needs and reviewing the county's efforts in addressing those needs. We are comprised of experts in prevention and treatment, and have representatives from the legal, business, and medical communities.

SB565 requires that law enforcement agencies have an employee assistance program that offers low- or no-cost mental health services to law enforcement. AODAAC supports this bill because it will address a significant gap in mental health support for law enforcement and, in turn, will enhance public safety by ensuring that those on the front lines are in the best possible position to perform their critical, life-saving functions.

But we ask the committee to consider two amendments to the bill: (1) to provide funding for the required law assistance programs to avoid the possibility that law enforcement agencies will have to divert operational resources to fulfill this new legislative mandate, and (2) to expand the scope of the bill to require fire departments to offer employee assistance programs, as the same need for such programs for law enforcement officers applies to fire and EMS personnel as well.

Research shows that a high percentage of law enforcement officers have mental health issues which often result in problematic drug and alcohol use. According to one expert, "one out of four police officers on the street has an alcohol or drug abuse issue."¹ At the same time, addiction disproportionately impacts police officers: "Substance use disorders among police officers are estimated to range between 20% and 30% as compared to under 10% in the general population." Several factors contribute to this reality, including exposure to traumatic incidents, trauma, pain, fatigue, and sleep deprivation. The "blue wall," or an actual or perceived culture of self-sufficiency in which emotions are to be kept under wraps and external help is not to be sought, also plays a role. Law enforcement also may decline the opportunity to receive mental health treatment because of worries surrounding the general stigma associated with mental health, concerns that seeking

help may jeopardize career advancement or their jobs altogether, and fears that they may be in therapeutic settings with the very population that they will be serving.²

Addiction is but one of the significant consequences of this situation, depression and suicide being some of the others. Without a legislative response, these acute mental health needs will continue to be unmet, police officers will continue to suffer, and operational readiness will continue to be compromised.

In short, we support SB565 because it reduces barriers to mental health services, will enhance officers' access to such services, and will enable them to receive the care that they need and may not otherwise obtain. SB565 will help improve the lives of the officers. Healthier and more resilient officers also will benefit their families, their communities, and our safety.

For all the reasons cited above, we urge the bill's passage, provided that the bill is amended to address the two concerns raised herein.

Thank you.

1. Indra Cidambi, M.D., Police and Addiction, Psychology Today, Mar. 30, 2018, available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sure-recovery/201803/police-and-addiction>.
2. Butler Center for Research, Alcohol Abuse Among Law Enforcement Officers, Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, Nov. 1, 2015, available at: <https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/education/bcr/addiction-research/alcohol-abuse-police-ru-716> (hereinafter "Hazelden Foundation Article"); Lewis Z. Schlosser, Ph.D., Opioid Use Disorders Among Police and Public Safety Personnel: What Law Enforcement Leaders Need to Know, Police Chief Magazine, available at: <https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/opioid-use-among-police-personnel/>.
3. Distress Tolerance Plays Role in Alcohol Use and Abuse Among Firefighters, Science Daily, Dec. 3, 2019, available at: <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/12/191203133841.htm>; John Keilman, Rehab Center Treats Firefighters, Paramedics for Alcohol Problems, Chicago Tribune, Nov. 30, 2014, available at: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-firefighters-addiction-met-20141130-story.html>.

Behavioral Health and Crisis Services