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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF (EX) HB 736
“OFFICER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM”**

Good Day Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary and Committee Members. Thank you for the opportunity to provide my oral testimony in support of HB 736. My name is Rachel Dolcine and I am the proud wife of an amazing Baltimore City Police Officer, Pierre Dolcine. My husband has been an Officer in Northeast Baltimore for 18 years and 3 months. Prior to joining the Baltimore City Police Department, Pierre was in the Marine Corp. Semper Fi. When Pierre completed his term in the Marine Corp, he wanted to become a Police Officer because he knew he was called to serve in that capacity. Unfortunately, neither of us were prepared for the way police life would consume our personal life, almost destroy our marriage and take its toll on our entire family's wellness.

I decided to show up today because I want you to see that this HB 736 has a face. Matter of fact, it has thousands of faces. This Bill represents the saving of lives, marriages and families. The men and women who serve our communities, at the risk of their own lives, see some of the most horrid forms of human depravity day in and day out. From decaying babies in bathtubs to bullet ridden bodies to battered domestic violence victims to heartbroken parents of runaway children to tattered bodies of addicts to broken bodies in wrecked cars to injuries of their comrades to death of their comrades to hate speech from the communities they serve, they absorb each trauma with no time to emotionally process. After a day bombarded by stress, they bring it all home. At home, they are expected to connect with their children, show affection and intimacy to their wife or husband, communicate openly, connect emotionally, take care of house duties, make home decisions and be present emotionally. This cycle continues until the dissolution of the marriage or retirement, whichever comes first. Officer wellness affects families because as they serve, we serve too.

Over the years, Pierre has experienced many tragedies: in the line and off duty deaths of partners and coworkers and his mother's passing (news which he heard at work and still completed his shift). He is a father who has missed many meaningful family events and milestones for our son. Our marriage has taken a beating and there we did not think we would make it. During the Freddie Gray unrest, he packed his to go bag and tried to soothe our son and my anxiety while supporting his brothers and sisters in blue while protecting and serving communities that were experiencing fear and violence. I don't think Pierre ever thought about his own wellbeing. Every day, he has to balance being a police officer, a peer mentor, a husband, a father, a provider, a protector and so much more. I often admire his strength and resilience under pressure that would cause so many other people to bend and break. He often reminds me that he doesn't have a job...he has a calling. Knowing he is living out his purpose keeps him going every day.

There is a hot and heavy conversation happening in the political arena around addressing trauma, its effects, its connection to crime, its connection to mental illness and what services are needed to assist communities impacted by trauma. I have listened to many political debates, townhalls,

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etc. and have yet to hear how this same political passion for addressing trauma in communities will translate to addressing trauma within the law enforcement community that is charged with protecting and serving these same communities that are affected by trauma. The idea that we cannot serve from an empty cup does not only apply to our personal lives. The men and women who protect and serve communities across this great State cannot continue to serve communities from empty cups. It is the responsibility of their employer and the representatives in this room to ensure that our Officers' have what they need to fill their cups. Otherwise, we will continue to have traumatized men and women serving traumatized communities.

Yesterday, I met with the Baltimore City Police Department's Officer Safety & Wellness team. I was pleased to learn that there are intentional steps being taken to address Officer wellness. They currently have a model that with support, tweaking and additional manpower will be extremely beneficial to Officers. I know that there are efforts being made across this state to address Officer wellness; however, passing the HB 736 this year will unify the efforts across Maryland ensuring that Officer wellness becomes a priority not just an optional side program. In addition, the urgency of Officer wellness impacts the quality of policing that occurs in our communities. As men and women voted in to make decisions in the best interest of its constituents, I would implore you to pass this Bill this year. We cannot wait another year to ensure the men and women who serve our communities in the law enforcement capacity are not well in every area of their lives.

Lastly, I started my testimony by stating that this Bill is about saving lives. In 2019, we lost 228 police officers to suicide (that we know of). This number does not include attempts. Many of these officers killed themselves with their own service weapons at home. They were found by their spouses or other loved ones. When Officer wellness is not a priority at work, it becomes a tragedy for us at home.

For these reasons, I ask for a FAVORABLE REPORT on HB 736.