



January 15, 2021

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

RE: Support – SB 74: Police Officers – Mental Health – Employee Assistance Programs

Dear Chairman Smith and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work 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 branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS and WPS support Senate Bill 74 (SB 74). 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." 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 . . . 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."

MPS and WPS will note that on page 3, lines 3 - 4, the bill encourages those tasked with developing the services envisioned under this bill to offer them at "minimal cost to a police officer." MPS and WPS believe that an important public policy issue such as this should be offered at no cost to police officers. In addition, MPS and WPS believe that the legislature



should consider expanding this noble idea to all first responders for they too experience similar daily trauma in their work.

For all the reasons above, MPS and WPS ask the committee for a favorable report of SB 74. 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 Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Legislative Action Committee