



BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Michael S. Harrison
Police Commissioner

TO: The Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Michelle Wirzberger, Esq., Director of Government Affairs, Baltimore Police Dept.

RE: Senate Bill 74 - Police Officers – Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021 – Employee Assistance Programs and Early Intervention Programs

DATE: March 25, 2021

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary, and members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore Police Department **supports** Senate Bill 74.

Senate Bill 74 requires all law enforcement agencies to develop and implement a confidential and nonpunitive early intervention system to identify officers who are at risk of engaging in excessive use of force and to provide officers with training, behavioral interventions and reassignments or other appropriate responses so as to reduce the risk of excessive force.

The bill further requires the following:

- ✓ Law enforcement agencies must provide access to an Employee Assistance Program for all police officers that the law enforcement agency employs.
- ✓ In addition to requirements of § 3-516 of the Public Safety Article, as a part of the employee assistance program required by the bill, before an officer returns to full duty, a law enforcement agency must provide the following confidential services:
 - A voluntary mental health consultation and voluntary counseling services before the officer returns to full duty if the officer is involved in an incident involving an accident resulting in a fatality.
 - A mandatory mental health consultation and voluntary counseling services to the officer if the officer is involved in an incident involving a serious injury to the officer; an officer-involved shooting or any use of force resulting in a fatality or serious injury.

Law enforcement officers leave their families every day to protect and serve others. On their best days, they experience trauma when arriving at crash scenes; addressing incidents of domestic violence; investigating shootings and murders; searching for lost children and vulnerable adults. If untreated, that trauma accumulates over time and can threaten the mental health and productivity of the officer.

Our officers deserve our support and assistance in relieving themselves of that trauma and ensuring that they are healthy. That is why the Baltimore Police Department has developed a comprehensive and well-regarded Health and Wellness Program that is led by a professional who experienced trauma when he served as a Maryland State Trooper and who all too well understands the shame, stress and pain of seeking mental health counseling to deal with that trauma. He has led the Baltimore Police Department's efforts to normalize self-care and make mental health treatment more accessible to all members of the Department.

Senate Bill 74 prioritizes the mental health of police officers and seeks to reduce the negative stigma of seeking mental services commonly experienced by members of law enforcement. Therefore, we respectfully request a **favorable** report on Senate Bill 74.