

Testimony of Major Joshua P, Woods of the Waterville Police Department

Hello, My Name is Joshua Woods, I'm the Major in command of the patrol division at the Waterville Police Department. I'm halfway through my 17th year in law enforcement. I started my law enforcement career in 2007 with the Waterville Police Department as a patrol officer working the night shift. After about 5 years I was promoted to detective. I served as a detective for 4 years and went back on patrol as a supervisor when I was promoted again to Sergeant. As a Sergeant, I supervised the night shift and eventually made the switch to day shift when it became available. I served as a patrol supervisor until last June when I was promoted to Major.

I was asked to come here today to share my story about seeking treatment as a Law enforcement Officer and the barriers that I encountered.

I was in about year 13 or 14 as a law enforcement Officer When I started to notice some mental and physical symptoms from the job. These symptoms included anxiety, chest pains, and digestive issues. I also noticed that I was having a difficult time sleeping and waking multiple times throughout the night. I did what most law enforcement officers do and ignored these symptoms and kept working though them.

Eventually I reached a point where I had such high levels of anxiety that I knew I had to do something about it or leave the profession. I made an appointment with my PCP for a yearly physical and went in with a plan to ask for treatment. During the Checkup, we got to a point where the doctor asked if there was anything I wanted to talk about. I mentioned the anxiety I had surrounding work. My doctor dismissed it saying that it was normal to have anxiety about work. This shut me down and I left that appointment disappointed.

About a year went by, I was going to work, dealing with the mental and physical tolls, and getting worse. Finally, my wife asked me if I still loved her. I said of course I do and asked why she was asking. She told me that I would go to work and then come home and stare at the wall and zone out. She said that I was physically there, but not mentally or emotionally present. This was a turning point for me. I had known for a while the toll that this job was taking on my mental health and the physical symptoms I was ignoring. What I didn't realize is what it was doing to my family. I made another appointment with my PCP.

I was called a week before my appointment to reschedule. I refused to reschedule the appointment and asked if there was someone else in the office I could see. I kept the appointment with one of the nurse practitioners in the office and went in with the mindset that I was not going to take no for an answer and that I would be walking out of there with a referral for my mental health. I went to this appointment and told the nurse practitioner what was going on and she immediately told me that she would give me a referral. This referral came with a catch. She told me that she would put the referral in, but that it would likely be several months before I could get an appointment.

I went back to work and disclosed to a coworker, That I was trying to seek treatment. His Wife is a mental health worker and he suggested that I call her, as she has connections with providers. I ended up reaching out to her and was in treatment within a week.

I'm currently under the care of a psychiatric nurse practitioner and see a therapist regularly. I have good days and bad days. I have told my story at the PD and encouraged and helped a handful of employees seek care.

