

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

LD 882 An Act to Protect Communication with Providers of Critical Incident Stress Management Peer Support

Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine supports the passage of *An Act to Protect Communication with Providers of Critical Incident Stress Management Peer Support*. Law enforcement is typically called to respond to individuals who are experiencing their worst days or most challenging experiences in their lives. First responders are witnesses to many of the most horrific moments in individuals' lives and in society. NAMI Maine is one of only two approved instructors in the state for the Group Critical Incident Stress Management class and the only Instructor Certified to Assisting Individuals in Crisis through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation. We have also responded to numerous critical incidents involving first responders across the state and continue to provide ongoing support to help connect them with resources.

The average individual will experience 2-3 critical or traumatic incidents during their lifetime. However, law enforcement personnel will experience 168-170 critical or traumatic incidents throughout the course of their careers, in addition to the 2-3 incidents that may occur in their personal lives. According to FIRST Help, a non-profit organization supporting the wellness of first responders, over 900 police officers have lost their lives to suicide since 2019. Police officers are 54% more likely to die of suicide than their contemporaries in non-first responder or military occupations¹.

As the number of first responders being lost to suicide is being discussed more, in 2019, the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act (LEMHWA) Report² was delivered to Congress for review and then grant implementation and planning to combat the risk through the COPS office. NAMI Maine successfully partnered with the York County Sheriff's Office in the development and implementation of one of the first cycles of this grant. During this period, we successfully supported the implementation of the Law Enforcement Peer Support Team for the region. This team has grown and recently received national recognition for the programs implemented. The foundation of the team is based on peer support, as officers support one another in both group and individual sessions. They can normalize responses to acutely abnormal situations and provide guidance and support, connecting individuals to resources in a manner considered best practice by the LEMHWA. This model is also considered best practice by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) guidelines for crisis care in the mental health system.³ In both models, peer support is outlined as critical in supporting individuals experiencing crisis, as well as the importance of confidentiality in interactions. Without trust and confidentiality in relationships, interactions have minimal impact in helping others due to concerns of information being utilized in negative ways, as there is still a significant stigma attached to mental health challenges.

Because of the significant risks faced by our first responders, we must strive to provide them with the best possible resources and systems to support them as they support their communities. Because of this, we ask the committee to support the passage of LD 882, to provide our first responders with best practice resources and support.

ABOUT NAMI MAINE: Incorporated in 1984, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maine Chapter (NAMI Maine) is the state's largest grassroots mental health organization. With support from national and regional affiliates, the agency is dedicated to building better lives for everyone impacted by behavioral health concerns. NAMI Maine engages with leaders and community partners at all levels to improve the state's mental health system through collaboration and education.

¹ Law enforcement worker suicide: an updated national assessment - PMC

² Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act: Report to Congress

³ Advisory: Peer Support Services in Crisis Care | SAMHSA

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