

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: My name is Brad Gallant. I am a resident of Rumford and a patrol supervisor with the Rumford PD.

I consider myself lucky when I look around at my peers. I spent a long time “minimizing” my work-related trauma and counting my blessings I was not working with Maine State Police Major Crimes covering gruesome homicides, or being a crash reconstructionist being called out to weekly fatal crashes. It was not until the spring of 2021, sitting on my back porch, that I truly acknowledged the impact long time exposure to trauma had on me. As I sat on that porch, the final decision I needed to make before I was going to kill myself, was to figure out who I was going to call or text to come find me. I thought about friends, co-workers, casual contacts, and even people I did not like. Ultimately, the one thing I could not do before leaving this world was saddle someone with the trauma of finding me. I was coming to grips with how cumulative and vicarious trauma had truly impacted me, and I simply could not make that last final damning decision.

I have been in law enforcement since 2008. I have worked my entire career in western Maine. Although I have not been a homicide detective or crash reconstructionist, I have been exposed to my share of traumatic events. Compounding that, I have seen first responder friends and co-workers exposed to numerous traumatic events. I have watched families fall apart, career changes, and first responders lose their careers or lives trying to make a positive impact.

I share something so personal, not because I seek sympathy or attention. I share my personal story as it supports the data. In 2021, the Maine Sheriff’s Association and U Maine’s Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center conducted a research study utilizing data from the national violent death reporting system on Line of Duty deaths and suicide from 2015-2021 in Maine. What they found was a law enforcement officer, in Maine, is 6 times more likely to die by suicide than in a Line of Duty related deadly incident. This number is likely smaller than reality due to under-reporting. Sadly, some people look at that trauma as “part of the job”, “what they signed up for”, or that “people should get over it”.

This all leads me to speaking in support of LD1425. This funding will help support trauma response support currently in place and working through the Maine Resiliency Center. I have had the opportunity to work with staff at the Maine Resiliency Center on a couple projects and I have personally witnessed the benefit of them. Although I was not on scene October 25, 2023 in Lewiston, I have close friends touched by the events; both that night and since the incident occurred. The Maine Resiliency Center has been a key player in getting people the support they need. They created a path for the future of peer support and networking, as well as community and first responder engagement as it relates to traumatic events. First responders often hesitate to seek help due to the stigma which can be associated with getting help, or because of comments like the ones above. Yet peer support is becoming one of the most highly utilized supports in the country for first responders and the Maine Resiliency Center is playing a key role in broadening those supports. Funding to support these efforts pays dividends in cutting future expensive, short-term interventions. I urge you to support LD1425, because no officer should be on their back porch thinking what I was when we have a way to make sure the tools are in place to prevent it.