

POSITION STATEMENT IN SUPPORT

LD 439: An Act to Allow Death by Suicide to Be Considered a Death While in the Line of Duty

Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety *Friday*
March 20th, 2023

As the state's largest grassroots mental health advocacy organization, NAMI Maine neither supports nor opposes the passage of *An Act to Allow Death by Suicide to be Considered a Death While in the Line of Duty*. NAMI Maine has supported many departments and officers over the years, both in times of acute crisis and in the aftermath of a suicide loss of an officer. First responders are the highest risk population for suicide death, as we ask extraordinary measures of their work for our communities, it is often at an extraordinary cost to their wellbeing.

Roughly 3.5% of the general population meets criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI). Law enforcement officers are at a significantly increased risk, with average estimates finding 20% of law enforcement officers meet criteria. Additionally, 10% of the general population will experience a substance use disorder. Again, law enforcement officers are at an increased risk, with estimates showing that 20-30% of law enforcement will struggle with one as a means to cope with the weight of their work. Due to the complexities of first responders' work, those in the field are faced with significant struggles that the general population struggles to understand, in turn, this can negatively impact their health and wellbeing. Additional injuries that occur to first responders that are strongly correlated with suicide risk include moral injury. We ask first responders to shoulder the burden of many societal problems, on top of witnessing horrors that many cannot fathom exist in our state. As a result, first responders begin to experience injury not just to their brain and body, but to their very foundational belief systems. This esteemed committee has demonstrated an understanding of the impact this field of work has on both responders and their families, through providing protections regarding officers seeking treatment and passing legislation protecting officer's confidentiality in seeking support, as well as recognizing that Posttraumatic Stress Injury is a work-related injury.

First responders face a daunting task and hold a high level of responsibility within the communities that they serve. They respond without question to the most horrific days of individual lives as a regular part of their day and assume responsibility for the safety of the communities they serve. The impact of suicide is horrific on these communities, but sadly is another risk they are willing to assume for others. We need to also accept the responsibilities of the impacts of the duties we ask them to perform.

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*

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT

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