



January 30, 2024
Testimony on HB2557
Submitted by Christopher Mann
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Chairman and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in favor HB 2557. I am the legal advisor to First Responder Support Team (FRST) Midwest. This bill is intended to provide clarity on the confidentiality of peer support in Kansas. On behalf of FRST Midwest and first responders across our state, I respectfully request that this Committee pass HB2557.

As an advocate for first responders and mental health, First Responder Support Team (FRST Midwest) aims to provide educational programs to promote healthy development following stress and critical incidents experienced by first responders and their families. As part of this work, FRST leads the implementation of a Peer Support Model for first responders across the region.

It is understood that first responders are often exposed to traumatic events, including traumatic and chaotic scenes, child victims, violent confrontations and physical injuries. These events can and do often cause severe emotional distress that can impact personal and professional lives of our first responders.

A critical aspect of first responder work is making good decisions that benefit the safety and health of the public. Ongoing research is being conducted on the impact these traumatic events and resulting untreated emotional impact have police decision making. Early evidence shows even a small decline in cognitive abilities in complex, high-stress situations can have negative results.¹

Beyond the impacts the communities they serve, there is a real risk of destructive personal behavior and suicide among first responders who experience traumatic events and do not receive proper treatment. Law enforcement officers in particular have a 54% increased risk of suicide compared to the average population.²

This is why it is critical that first responders have access to help when and where they need it. The Peer Support Model addressed in this bill has seen significant positive results in preliminary studies. The model addresses many of the barriers to treatment found in first responders. One of those barriers is confidentiality. First responders often fear reprisal for admitting the need for help.³

Confidentiality is a key component of the support provided under the peer support model. In Kansas, the current law allows for confidentiality, but neglects to include the realities of the actual support that is provided. Support does not always happen in a clinical environment. It can be outside a burned-out building, at the hospital after a serious injury, at a traumatic scene or even in a phone call or text

indicating the need for help. This bill simply clarifies the reality that first responders do not work or live in a sterile, clinical environment. It allows the need to match the reality.

Thank you for your time and consideration in making sure our first responders have the important resources necessary to provide for our communities. FRST asks this bill be passed from committee.

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1. T.J. Covey, Janet L Shucard, John M Violanti, and David Shucard, "The Effects of Exposure to Traumatic Stressors on Inhibitory Control in Police Officers: A Dense Electrode Array Study Using a Go/NoGo Continuous Performance Task, *International Journal of Psychophysiology* 87 (2013): 363–375, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpsycho.2013.03.009>
2. Anthony Ford, "Police Officer Suicide and Suicide Prevention" (2023): <https://sites.bu.edu/daniellerousseau/2023/02/28/police-officer-suicide-and-suicide-prevention/>
3. Emily Cnapich, Samantha Rodriguez, Bailee Schuhmann, Judy Couwels, Vincent Van Hasselt, and Jessica Blalock, "First Responder Peer Support Programs" FBI: Law Enforcement Bulletin, April 6, 2022. <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/first-responder-peer-support-programs>