

HB17-1215 Mental Health Support For Peace Officers

Representatives **COLEMAN, BENAVIDEZ, CARVER, HEROD, LAWRENCE, SALAZAR, WEISSMAN, FOOTE, MELTON, THURLOW, WILLETT**

Senators **GARDNER, KAGAN, AGUILAR, CORAM**

PURPOSE

The bill addresses two fundamental areas of law enforcement work:

1. This bill aims to preserve the well-being of Colorado's communities and police officers by reducing the severity and pervasiveness of psychological distress commonly associated with police work by promoting and making available mental health resources to address issues such as insomnia, anxiety, depression and PTSD.
2. Further, law enforcement officers are continuously interacting with individuals in the throes of mental health crisis and the mere presence of a badge has the potential to escalate mental health episodes.

BACKGROUND

- Law enforcement officers are exposed to numerous traumatic experiences and it is vital to address the manifestations of psychological stress as early as possible.
- Exposure to the pain, suffering and distress of others, as well as the looming concern for their own safety as well as the safety of the people around them, would weigh heavy on anyone's shoulders, and our police officers are subjected to it every day. As a result, 15-18% of officers suffer from PTSD and are more likely to suffer from other psychologically associated health risks.¹
- The stresses that police officers face, as well as the associated health risks, is further augmented by a culture of reclusiveness, meaning that officers often struggle to discuss psychological and emotional impact of their work. The inevitable result of this culture is that many officers go untreated for the psychological stress.²
- Despite the substantial resources going towards Crisis Intervention Training and the ongoing modernization of treatment of the mentally ill in the criminal justice system, there are times when a mental health professional is better suited to address the immediate needs of this community.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION

- This bill encourages sheriff's offices and municipal police departments to adopt policies allowing for mental health professionals to provide general counseling services to members of that department.
- Established in this bill is the Peace Officer Mental Health Support Grant Program and Fund. It is intended that this grant program be used to cover/supplement the cost of mental health services required by police departments.
- The bill helps to give officers the tools they need to maintain well-being and perform their duties to their fullest extent.
- HB1215 would enhance opportunities for local governments to engage in co-responder models to better meet the public safety needs of the community.
- This grant sunsets September 1st 2027



Colorado Association of
Chiefs of Police



¹ Kulbarsh, Pamela, "2015 Police Suicide Statistics," Officer.com, January 13, 2016, <http://www.officer.com/article/12156622/2015-police-suicide-statistics>

² McGhee, Tom, "Police officers struggle with PTSD, but treatment can bring stigma," The Denver Post, June 18, 2014, <http://www.denverpost.com/2014/06/18/police-officers-struggle-with-ptsd-but-treatment-can-bring-stigma/>