

# BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## **City Council Bill 22-0091R** **The Effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on First Responders**

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Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) has reviewed Council Resolution 22-0091R, which invites city agencies to inform the Baltimore City Council of factors that lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the types of intervention programs that are already available or are able to be provided to employees witnessing trauma on the job, and the steps agencies are taking to alleviate employees' exposure to trauma.

While more than half of U.S. adults are exposed to a severe stressor at some point during the course of their life, this number is much higher for occupational groups such as police officers and firefighters. The Baltimore City School Police Force (School Police), under the leadership of Chief Akil Hamm, recognizes that officers are at much greater risk for PTSD. According to the Stay Safe Foundation, some common symptoms of PTSD include:

- Re-experiencing traumatic symptoms through distressing memories that are involuntary, continue to occur, and may involve flashbacks, nightmares, and thoughts that are disruptive and intrusive
- Avoiding certain places or activities that trigger memories of the traumatic event
- Experiencing depression, guilt or fear
- Having trouble recalling the traumatic event and experiencing “derealization,” a mental state where someone feels detached from his or her surroundings
- Becoming hyper-vigilant or easily startled
- Having difficulty sleeping

In order to mitigate the effects of PTSD, School Police partners with Beacon Health Options to provide an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The program spans the full scope of behavioral health services, which allows the program to deliver evidence-based, better care to help people see long-lasting changes. Whether someone is coping with everyday personal stressors, or longer-term professional challenges, Beacon's clinical knowledge can make a measurable difference in their lives

In addition, in the wake of the tragic incident that took place at Mervo in September, City Schools bolstered its available supports for both students and staff. In addition to the usual EAP services, clinicians from Baltimore Crisis Response, Inc. (BCRI), Baltimore Child and Adolescent Response System (BCARS), and the Maryland State Department of Education provided support to staff members. BCRI also implemented a series of crisis debrief sessions. These services were available to school police officers, as well as other staff.

Finally, just as School Police reinforce with training the belief that the vast majority of instances involving young people can be resolved with de-escalation, self-de-escalation, and a restorative mindset, the same practices hold true for our officers. This intentional training is part of the district's commitment to ensuring positive and supportive relationships within our schools and amongst our officers.

City Schools supports the proposed resolution and remains committed to learning from our sister agencies as we collectively work to support Baltimore's first responders.