



BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Michael S. Harrison
Police Commissioner

February 1, 2023

Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
Room 400, City Hall
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

**RE: City Council Bill #22-0091R
Informational Hearing—The Effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
on First Responders**

Dear Council President Mosby and Members of the City Council:

The Baltimore Police Department (BPD) has reviewed Council Bill 22-0091R for the purpose of inviting the Commissioner of the Baltimore City Police Department, the Chief of the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore City Sheriff, the Chief of the Baltimore City School Police, the Director of the Office of Emergency Management, the Chief of the Baltimore City Environmental Police, and the Director of the Department of Human Resources to appear before the Baltimore City Council to discuss how post-traumatic stress symptoms, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), compassion fatigue, and burnout effect first responders and to inform the Council on intervention programs that are currently in place to provide City employees with relief from trauma and burnout.

First responders are exposed to traumatic situations more often than the general population. The very nature of a first responder's job is to prevent, mitigate, or remedy disasters of varying magnitudes. An estimated 10-14% of first responders are diagnosed with PTSD from one or multiple traumatic, high intensity experiences.

Symptoms of PTSD make it difficult for those suffering to function under the most normal circumstances. Flashbacks, avoidance, intrusive thoughts, and alterations in mood and cognition are just a few of the symptoms that sufferers face. It is crucial that anyone experiencing PTSD is provided with the services and support that they need to heal. This is especially true for first responders who are answering the call to save others from traumatic experiences.

The BPD understands the impact of PTSD and the importance of providing our officers with the tools and support necessary to make them the best they can be for themselves and the public they serve. The department's Officer Safety & Wellness Section (OSW) is designed to advocate for the mental and physical health of police officers and civilian employees. Created in 2019, OSW has been led by Director Vernon Herron and an

assembled team of subject matter experts. The section is comprised of two units: Health & Wellness and Early Intervention.

Health & Wellness

The Health & Wellness Unit is responsible for ensuring that officers have access to resources that promote mental and physical health. Stress Reduction, fitness, and nutrition are three major components. This unit relies on internal and external partners to ensure a variety of methods that promote wellness.

In addition to mental and physical health maintenance, the Health & Wellness Unit responds to critical incidents involving officers. Examples of critical incidents are as follows:

- Line of duty death of a department member
- Serious injury to a department member
- Serious accidents
- Police involved shooting incidents
- Departmental member experiencing mental health issues

Response includes but is not limited to peer support on scene and private counseling and medical care following a critical incident. Baltimore Health Services (BHS) partners with BPD to provide these confidential services free of charge.

Early Intervention

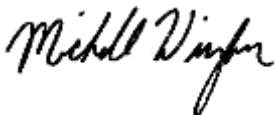
The Early Intervention Unit (EIU) monitors members who are practicing potentially problematic behavior. The goal is to speak with officers in question before officers act in way that causes crisis, disciplinary action or termination. At-risk officers are identified and provided with wrap around services to assist them in their time of need.

Officer Therapy Dog

Therapy animals are often used comfort those experiencing critical incidents and trauma. Penny, BPD's therapy dog, is hypoallergenic and acts as a mascot for Officer Safety & Wellness. Penny has received 72 hours of obedience training at Stateline Canine and passed the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen test.

BPD has no objections to City Council Bill 22-0091R. We look forward to a robust discussion on this pressing issue. Thank you for allowing us to comment on this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,



Michelle Wirzberger, Esq.
Director of Government Affairs

cc: Natwana Austin, Executive Secretary of the Baltimore City Council
Nina Themelis, Special Assistant and Legislative Liaison, MOGR
Andrew Smullian, BPD Deputy Chief of Staff