

F R O M	Name & Title	Dr. Letitia Dzirasa, Commissioner	Health Department AGENCY REPORT	
	Agency Name & Address	Health Department 1001 E. Fayette Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201		
	Subject/ Position:	22-0091R – Informational Hearing – The Effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on First Responders Favorable		

To: President and Members
of the City Council
c/o 409 City Hall

Feb 1, 2023

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review Council Bill #22-0091R, entitled, “The Effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on First Responders.” The purpose of this resolution is 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, often the first on the scene of an emergency and/or dangerous situation, have an increased likelihood of regular exposure to trauma, which is linked to psychological distress. This psychological distress may manifest itself as depression, anxiety, PTSD, substance use disorder, or suicidal thoughts and/or attempted suicide.¹

While traditionally not considered first responders, BCHD has many staff members who serve on the front lines and are often the first to respond to emergencies and/or dangerous situations. Examples of this include our Animal Control enforcement officers and Community Risk Reduction Services workers. Additionally, the ongoing response to COVID-19 has many public health workers experiencing COVID fatigue, burnout, and a range of mental health challenges. A report from 2021 documented rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among 26,741 public health workers. Of those surveyed, 53% reported at least one adverse mental health condition in the two weeks prior, including depression (30.8%), PTSD (36.8%), or suicidal ideation (8.4%).² Burnout from the pandemic response also threatens the future of the public

¹ <https://www.jems.com/administration-and-leadership/first-responders-and-ptsd-a-literature-review/>

² Bryant-Genevier J, Rao CY, Lopes-Cardozo B, et al. Symptoms of Depression, Anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Suicidal Ideation Among State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Public Health Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, March–April 2021. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2021;70:1680–1685. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7048a6>

health workforce, with 66% of public health workers reporting burnout in a 2020 study.³ As a city agency, BCHD recommends that any staff needing support contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and/or call the 988 crisis hotline. Additionally, BCHD has hosted wellness events, exercises, and town halls for staff, particularly as we continue responding to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

BCHD recommends a **favorable** position on Council Bill #22-0091R and defers to the Department of Human Resources, the Baltimore City Fire Department, and other agencies that have first responders.

³ Stone KW, KIntzinger KW, Jagger MA, Horney JA. Public health worker burnout in the COVID-19 response in the US. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021;18(8):4369.