



DATE: April 1, 2021

TO: Rep. William J. Lippert Jr., Chair; Rep. Anne B. Donahue, Vice Chair;
and members of the House Committee on Health Care

FROM: Trevor Whipple, Law Enforcement Risk Management Consultant

RE: Support of S.42 and the Emergency Service Provider Wellness Commission

I write today in support of S.42, a bill that would establish an Emergency Service Provider Wellness Commission.

VLCT, on behalf of its members, believes the legislation would have a positive impact on our emergency service providers and the communities they serve.

There can be an immense mental strain on the individuals and families who serve as emergency service providers. Encounters with traumatic situations, death, the grief of others, and the continual human challenges in our society take a toll. Currently in our nation, more police officers and firefighters die of suicide than in the line of duty. According to Blue H.E.L.P., an organization that honors the service of law enforcement officers who died by suicide, 238 law enforcement officers and 133 firefighters took their own lives in the U.S. in 2019.

It is not uncommon for our members to see evidence of the mental struggles faced by their police, fire, EMS, and dispatch staff. The evidence can manifest as lack of job satisfaction, personal relationship issues, overuse of alcohol, increased use of sick leave, and thoughts of self-harm. We know that accumulated trauma not only puts emergency service providers at risk of mental injuries, it also reduces retention and negatively affects recruitment for these positions that are already difficult to fill. Creating an Emergency Service Provider Wellness Commission will help to advance the acceptance of – and willingness to address – the mental trauma these providers face on a regular basis.

This commission would have the opportunity to emphasize taking care of one's mental health as well as one's physical health. It would provide the mechanism to further understand these risks and how to better serve the mental health needs of those who have accepted the difficult task of serving as emergency service providers. The work would also help to reduce the stigma of seeking help via peer support or a qualified clinician and ultimately benefit our members as they would have healthier emergency service providers.

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to comment on this important legislation.