

Good evening:

I write in support of H.270, a bill creating confidentiality protections for peer communication and support services for emergency service providers.

I have worked closely with EMS, Fire, and Police first responders for much of my professional career in municipal government and for many years on the front lines as a volunteer firefighter. Even though we may love what we do, being a first responder is extremely stressful, whether from the 'slow burn' of repeated incidents at all hours of day and night or the singular, intense stress of a traumatic incident. During these years, I have witnessed a slow, steady evolution from the old days of keeping stresses bottled up inside to a healthier approach to talking about and reaching out for help. Positive progress, but still ongoing and needed.

More recently, I have been grateful to serve as part of a statewide peer support team for first responders. We are available upon request to conduct Critical Incident Stress Debriefings, where first responders can get together to talk through and process emotions and stress in a healthy, guided fashion. Having helped to facilitate these debriefings, which tend to be emotionally powerful, it is clear to me that having these be confidential helps all involved to feel more comfortable and willing to participate openly than they would otherwise.

That said, these debriefings are one-time events, and first responders may want or need longer term professional help to process the strains and stresses of this work. H.270 would ensure that ongoing confidentiality, so that individuals will be more likely to seek out what they need to help keep themselves, their families, and their workplaces healthier.

As but one tangible reason to help illustrate why this is important: it has been reported in the past that more firefighters die by suicide than in the line of duty.

By ensuring confidentiality when seeking help, more first responders will likely seek that help. Passing H.270 is an important step forward for all emergency service providers.

Thank you for listening, and for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Lee Krohn

Resident of Charlotte, VT

Volunteer Firefighter (ret) and Peer Support Team (current)