

HB 1775 Position Statement

Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police

Va. Assn. of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators

Contact: Dana Schrad, VACP/VACLEA Executive Director – dana@vachiefs.org

Herndon Chief Maggie DeBoard/VACP Legislative Chair – maggie.deboard@herndon-va.gov

Chesterfield County Chief/VACP President Jeffrey Katz - katzj@chesterfield.gov

Statistics

- An average person experiences 2-3 critical incidents or traumatic events in their lifetime. **A law enforcement officer can experience as many as 180 exposures!**
- Law enforcement officers do not get “used to” the trauma to which they are exposed. **Trauma is cumulative** and left untreated, can become debilitating and destructive.
- **Police officers are at a higher risk of suicide than any other profession.** Researchers are attributing these statistics to the combination of easy access to deadly weapons, intense stress, and human devastation that officers are exposed to daily. The level of stress also is exacerbated by long hours and short staffing that has significantly worsened in the profession since 2020 (and this trend is not improving).
- **Both police officers fire fighters are more likely to die by suicide than be killed in the line of duty. Suicides outnumber line of duty deaths almost every year.**
- Traumatic exposures can impair the mental well-being of officers and affect their ability to perform their duties effectively, representing both a risk to safety and a liability.

National Wellness Survey for Public Safety Personnel

- Conducted in 2020 to 2021, this is the most comprehensive, validated study to date that measured self-reported symptoms of anxiety, depression and PTSD, and disclosed magnitude of suicide ideation within the past month.
- The following table represents **moderate to severe** levels of depression and anxiety, **clinical levels of significance** for PTSD, and the number that reported **thoughts of suicide ideation within the past month** in each first responder category.

	Sworn Law Enforcement (VA Stats)	Sworn Law Enforcement (Natl. Stats)	Fire and Rescue (Natl. Stats)	National Average for Adults (NIMH)
Depression	19%	6%	10%	8.4%

Anxiety	20%	16%	18%	2.7%
PTSD	12%	11%	12%	3.6%
Suicide Ideation	12%	7%	10%	4.9%

***The summary for state of VA law enforcement showed significantly higher levels over national statistics in most categories**

Deficiencies in Workers Compensation Coverage

- Most “injuries” officers incur in the line of duty involve traumatic exposures to critical incidents; unlike a physical injury which is visible and treated medically, traumatic exposure injuries involve the brain, are invisible, and largely are not recognized or treated – **yet they can be the most debilitating to an officer over time.**
- The current bill does not provide workers compensation benefits to an officer or firefighter who is struggling from a traumatic exposure **until they have developed PTSD** – we want to help officers **BEFORE** they progress to this point. **We want to save officers from suicide and disability related separations.**
- Depression and anxiety are conditions that often develop **before** PTSD – they are also easier to treat.
- Left untreated, many first responders self-medicate with alcohol, drugs, or other self-destructive and abusive behaviors to cope with the stress and trauma they deal with daily. Alcohol and drugs enhance the potential for suicide.
- In the VA survey results, **21% of law enforcement officers indicated problems with alcohol.**
- Most law enforcement agencies do not have clinical resources available within their own departments to treat anxiety, depression or PTSD.
- EAP is not a viable solution for traumatic exposures – officers and firefighters need access through workers compensation to culturally competent clinicians who understand the unique stressors of the job and have experience treating first responders.

****Workers Compensation under this legislation ONLY APPLIES if the condition resulted from an incident or exposure to a qualifying, work-related event, a mental health professional diagnoses the condition, and the exposure or incident is determined to be the primary cause of the depression, anxiety, or PTSD.**