



National Police Association  
8710 Bash Street #501692  
Indianapolis, IN 46250  
NationalPolice.org

**TESTIMONY ENCOURAGING THE PASSAGE OF SB 103: “An Act relating to peer counseling support programs for law enforcement agencies, emergency service providers, and the Department of Corrections.” March 27, 2023**

As an education and advocacy group, part of our mission is to encourage public officials to work proactively with law enforcement agencies to benefit the community. To that end, the **National Police Association** would like to encourage the Alaska State Legislature to allow confidential peer support counseling programs to provide emotional and moral support and counseling to peace officers and other emergency service personnel who have or will experience trauma in the line of duty.

Most police officers will see more extreme trauma and human tragedy in their first two years on patrol than most people will experience in a lifetime. These experiences combined with the uncertainty of making traffic stops and responding to dangerous events, verbal and physical assaults on officers, and the very real concern of police officers that they may be sued, terminated or indicted as a result of a use of force incident can weigh heavily on the minds and emotions of law enforcement personnel. In a recent survey by Police1.com 47% of the respondents screened positive for Post Traumatic Stress. Peer support programs can be incredibly effective in helping employees deal with the organization stress and the trauma of day to day police work and other related emergency services.

Very often police officers and dispatchers are hesitant to utilize Employee Assistance Programs or insurance-based counseling services because of privacy concerns. Additionally, traditional mental health counselors are often unprepared

to deal with the level of trauma experienced by police personnel and often the police officer client ends up “counseling the counselor” instead of receiving much needed help. Confidential peer support programs allow people to share their own experiences and offer practical guidance in a safe and relatable manner, helping all agency personnel to stay mentally strong and emotionally resilient.

Difficulty in the recruitment and retention of police officers is a nationwide problem, and Alaska is not immune to the issue. The implementation of well-trained peer support counseling can also help agencies retain experienced personnel.

The **National Police Association** believes that the mental health of our nation’s police officers, dispatchers, corrections officers, firefighters and other emergency personnel is critically important to their ability to help keep our communities safe, and we strongly encourages the passage of SB 103.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.