



Cosponsor the Helping Emergency Responders Overcome (HERO) Act

- **What would the Hero Act do?** The HERO Act would establish a series of programs designed to address public safety behavioral health issues, including:
 - A grant program for peer-support behavioral health and wellness programs at fire and EMS departments.
 - Directing the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) in coordination with the Department of Health and Human Services to develop and make publicly available resources to be used by the federal government and other entities to educate mental health professionals about the unique behavioral health issues that firefighters and EMS personnel face.
 - A system for collecting data on suicide deaths of public safety officers, including firefighters.
- **Why is the HERO Act Needed?** Studies have found that suicide, depression, and substance abuse are significant issues for public safety personnel. Congress had recognized this by expanding the eligibility for the Public Safety Officers Benefit Program (PSOB) to those who are disabled by work related post-traumatic stress (PTS) and to the family members of public safety officers who die from work-related suicide. This is due to the high-stress nature of the job, exposure to traumatic incidents, intense physical strain and shift work/lack of sleep.
- **Why are peer support programs important?** Many emergency responders choose not to seek help for behavioral health due to concern that they will not be taken seriously, or even be looked down on or viewed as “weak” for struggling emotionally. Many also still feel there is a stigma associated with seeking help from a mental health professional. Evidence has shown that emergency responders are more willing to seek help from a peer who has first had experience with the unique stress and experiences associated with their job. There is also much less stigma associated with seeking help from a fellow emergency responder than a mental health professional.
- **Why is tracking data on public safety officer suicide deaths important?** Emergency responders are at an elevated risk for suicide compared to the general public. Studies have found that emergency responders have approximately three and a half times higher rates of suicide ideation and suicide attempts, and approximately five times higher rates of suicide plans when compared to the general public. Additionally, evidence has shown that volunteer firefighters have elevated levels of suicide plans and attempts compared to career firefighters. Tracking public safety officer suicide data would enable a better understanding of why public safety officers commit suicide and help prevent these suicides in the future.
- **Status:** Soon to be reintroduced in the 119th Congress, as of January 27. Bill numbers in the 118th Congress were H.R. 4274/ S.1925.