

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2700

To require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to improve the detection, prevention, and treatment of mental health issues among public safety officers, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

AUGUST 10, 2021

Ms. ROSEN (for herself and Mrs. FISCHER) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to improve the detection, prevention, and treatment of mental health issues among public safety officers, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Helping Emergency
5 Responders Overcome Act” or the “HERO Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. DATA SYSTEM TO CAPTURE NATIONAL PUBLIC**
 2 **SAFETY OFFICER SUICIDE INCIDENCE.**

3 The Public Health Service Act is amended by insert-
 4 ing before section 318 of such Act (42 U.S.C. 247c) the
 5 following:

6 **“SEC. 317V. DATA SYSTEM TO CAPTURE NATIONAL PUBLIC**
 7 **SAFETY OFFICER SUICIDE INCIDENCE.**

8 “(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, in coordination
 9 with other agencies as the Secretary determines appro-
 10 priate, may—

11 “(1) develop and maintain a data system, to be
 12 known as the Public Safety Officer Suicide Report-
 13 ing System, for the purposes of—

14 “(A) collecting data on the suicide inci-
 15 dence among public safety officers; and

16 “(B) facilitating the study of successful
 17 interventions to reduce suicide among public
 18 safety officers; and

19 “(2) integrate such system into the National
 20 Violent Death Reporting System, so long as the Sec-
 21 retary determines such integration to be consistent
 22 with the purposes described in paragraph (1).

23 “(b) DATA COLLECTION.—In collecting data for the
 24 Public Safety Officer Suicide Reporting System, the Sec-
 25 retary shall, at a minimum, collect the following informa-
 26 tion:

1 “(1) The total number of suicides in the United
2 States among all public safety officers in a given cal-
3 endar year.

4 “(2) Suicide rates for public safety officers in
5 a given calendar year, disaggregated by—

6 “(A) age and gender of the public safety
7 officer;

8 “(B) State;

9 “(C) occupation; including both the indi-
10 vidual’s role in their public safety agency and
11 their primary occupation in the case of volun-
12 teer public safety officers;

13 “(D) where available, the status of the
14 public safety officer as volunteer, paid-on-call,
15 or career; and

16 “(E) where available, the status of the
17 public safety officer as active or retired.

18 “(c) DATA PRIVACY AND SECURITY.—In developing
19 and maintaining the Public Safety Officer Suicide Report-
20 ing System, the Secretary shall ensure that all applicable
21 Federal privacy and security protections are followed to
22 ensure that—

23 “(1) the confidentiality and anonymity of sui-
24 cide victims and their families are protected, includ-

1 ing so as to ensure that data cannot be used to deny
2 benefits; and

3 “(2) data is sufficiently secure to prevent unau-
4 thorized access.

5 “(d) REPORTING.—

6 “(1) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than 2 years
7 after the date of enactment of the Helping Emer-
8 gency Responders Overcome Act, and biannually
9 thereafter, the Secretary shall submit a report to the
10 Congress on the suicide incidence among public safe-
11 ty officers. Each such report shall—

12 “(A) include the number and rate of such
13 suicide incidence, disaggregated by age, gender,
14 and State of employment;

15 “(B) identify characteristics and contrib-
16 uting circumstances for suicide among public
17 safety officers;

18 “(C) disaggregate rates of suicide by—

19 “(i) occupation;

20 “(ii) status as volunteer, paid-on-call,
21 or career, where available; and

22 “(iii) status as active or retired, where
23 available;

1 “(D) include recommendations for further
2 study regarding the suicide incidence among
3 public safety officers;

4 “(E) specify in detail, if found, any obsta-
5 cles in collecting suicide rates for volunteers
6 and include recommended improvements to
7 overcome such obstacles;

8 “(F) identify options for interventions to
9 reduce suicide among public safety officers; and

10 “(G) describe procedures to ensure the
11 confidentiality and anonymity of suicide victims
12 and their families, as described in subsection
13 (c)(1).

14 “(2) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY.—Upon the submis-
15 sion of each report to the Congress under paragraph
16 (1), the Secretary shall make the full report publicly
17 available on the website of the Centers for Disease
18 Control and Prevention.

19 “(e) DEFINITION.—In this section, the term ‘public
20 safety officer’ means—

21 “(1) a public safety officer as defined in section
22 1204 of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe
23 Streets Act of 1968; or

24 “(2) a public safety telecommunicator as de-
25 scribed in detailed occupation 43–5031 in the Stand-

1 ard Occupational Classification Manual of the Office
2 of Management and Budget (2018).

3 “(f) PROHIBITED USE OF INFORMATION.—Notwith-
4 standing any other provision of law, if an individual is
5 identified as deceased based on information contained in
6 the Public Safety Officer Suicide Reporting System, such
7 information may not be used to deny or rescind life insur-
8 ance payments or other benefits to a survivor of the de-
9 ceased individual.”.

10 **SEC. 3. PEER-SUPPORT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND**
11 **WELLNESS PROGRAMS WITHIN FIRE DEPART-**
12 **MENTS AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE**
13 **AGENCIES.**

14 (a) IN GENERAL.—Part B of title III of the Public
15 Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 243 et seq.) is amended
16 by adding at the end the following:

17 **“SEC. 320C. PEER-SUPPORT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND**
18 **WELLNESS PROGRAMS WITHIN FIRE DEPART-**
19 **MENTS AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE**
20 **AGENCIES.**

21 “(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may award grants
22 to eligible entities for the purpose of establishing or en-
23 hancing peer-support behavioral health and wellness pro-
24 grams within fire departments and emergency medical
25 services agencies.

1 “(b) PROGRAM DESCRIPTION.—A peer-support be-
2 havioral health and wellness program funded under this
3 section shall—

4 “(1) use career and volunteer members of fire
5 departments or emergency medical services agencies
6 to serve as peer counselors;

7 “(2) provide training to members of career, vol-
8 unteer, and combination fire departments or emer-
9 gency medical service agencies to serve as such peer
10 counselors;

11 “(3) purchase materials to be used exclusively
12 to provide such training; or

13 “(4) disseminate such information and mate-
14 rials as are necessary to conduct the program.

15 “(c) DEFINITION.—In this section:

16 “(1) The term ‘eligible entity’ means a non-
17 profit organization with expertise and experience
18 with respect to the health and life safety of members
19 of fire and emergency medical services agencies.

20 “(2) The term ‘member’—

21 “(A) with respect to an emergency medical
22 services agency, means an employee who is a
23 member of a rescue squad or ambulance crew
24 (as defined in section 1204 of title I of the Om-
25 nibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of

1 1968 (34 U.S.C. 10284)), regardless of rank or
 2 whether the employee receives compensation;
 3 and

4 “(B) with respect to a fire department,
 5 means any employee, regardless of rank or
 6 whether the employee receives compensation, of
 7 a Federal, State, Tribal, or local fire depart-
 8 ment who is responsible for responding to calls
 9 for emergency service.”.

10 (b) TECHNICAL CORRECTION.—Effective as if in-
 11 cluded in the enactment of the Children’s Health Act of
 12 2000 (Public Law 106–310), the amendment instruction
 13 in section 1603 of such Act is amended by striking “Part
 14 B of the Public Health Service Act” and inserting “Part
 15 B of title III of the Public Health Service Act”.

16 **SEC. 4. DEVELOPMENT OF RESOURCES FOR EDUCATING**
 17 **MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS ABOUT**
 18 **TREATING FIRE FIGHTERS AND EMERGENCY**
 19 **MEDICAL SERVICES PERSONNEL.**

20 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator, in consulta-
 21 tion with the Secretary of Health and Human Services,
 22 shall develop and make publicly available resources that
 23 may be used by the Federal Government and other entities
 24 to educate mental health professionals about—

1 (1) the culture of Federal, State, Tribal, and
2 local career, volunteer, and combination fire depart-
3 ments and emergency medical services agencies;

4 (2) the different stressors experienced by fire-
5 fighters and emergency medical services personnel,
6 supervisory firefighters and emergency medical serv-
7 ices personnel, and chief officers of fire departments
8 and emergency medical services agencies;

9 (3) challenges encountered by retired fire-
10 fighters and emergency medical services personnel;
11 and

12 (4) evidence-based therapies for mental health
13 issues common to firefighters and emergency med-
14 ical services personnel within such departments and
15 agencies.

16 (b) CONSULTATION.—In developing resources under
17 subsection (a), the Administrator, in coordination with the
18 Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall consult
19 with national fire and emergency medical services organi-
20 zations.

21 (c) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

22 (1) ADMINISTRATOR.—The term “Adminis-
23 trator” means the Administrator of the United
24 States Fire Administration.

1 (2) CHIEF OFFICER.—The term “chief officer”
 2 means any individual who is responsible for the over-
 3 all operation of a fire department or an emergency
 4 medical services agency, irrespective of whether such
 5 individual also serves as a firefighter or emergency
 6 medical services personnel.

7 (3) EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES PER-
 8 SONNEL.—The term “emergency medical services
 9 personnel” means an employee who is a member of
 10 a rescue squad or ambulance crew (as defined in sec-
 11 tion 1204 of title I of the Omnibus Crime Control
 12 and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (34 U.S.C. 10284)),
 13 regardless of rank or whether the employee receives
 14 compensation.

15 (4) FIREFIGHTER.—The term “firefighter”
 16 means any employee, regardless of rank or whether
 17 the employee receives compensation, of a Federal,
 18 State, Tribal, or local fire department who is respon-
 19 sible for responding to calls for emergency service.

20 **SEC. 5. BEST PRACTICES AND OTHER RESOURCES FOR AD-**
 21 **DRESSING POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DIS-**
 22 **ORDER IN PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS.**

23 (a) DEVELOPMENT; UPDATES.—The Secretary of
 24 Health and Human Services shall—

1 (1) develop and assemble evidence-based best
2 practices and other resources to identify, prevent,
3 and treat posttraumatic stress disorder and co-oc-
4 ccurring disorders in public safety officers; and

5 (2) reassess and update, as the Secretary deter-
6 mines necessary, such best practices and resources,
7 including based upon the options for interventions to
8 reduce suicide among public safety officers identified
9 in the annual reports required by section
10 317V(d)(1)(F) of the Public Health Service Act, as
11 added by section 2 of this Act.

12 (b) CONSULTATION.—In developing, assembling, and
13 updating the best practices and resources under sub-
14 section (a), the Secretary of Health and Human Services
15 shall consult with, at a minimum, the following:

16 (1) Public health experts.

17 (2) Mental health experts with experience in
18 studying suicide and other profession-related trau-
19 matic stress.

20 (3) Clinicians with experience in diagnosing and
21 treating mental health issues.

22 (4) Relevant national police, fire, and emer-
23 gency medical services organizations.

24 (c) AVAILABILITY.—The Secretary of Health and
25 Human Services shall make the best practices and re-

1 sources under subsection (a) available to Federal, State,
2 and local fire, law enforcement, and emergency medical
3 services agencies.

4 (d) FEDERAL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PRO-
5 GRAMS.—The Secretary of Health and Human Services
6 shall work with Federal departments and agencies, includ-
7 ing the United States Fire Administration, to incorporate
8 education and training on the best practices and resources
9 under subsection (a) into Federal training and develop-
10 ment programs for public safety officers.

11 (e) DEFINITION.—In this section, the term “public
12 safety officer” means—

13 (1) a public safety officer, as defined in section
14 1204 of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe
15 Streets Act of 1968 (34 U.S.C. 10284); or

16 (2) a public safety telecommunicator, as de-
17 scribed in detailed occupation 43–5031 in the Stand-
18 ard Occupational Classification Manual of the Office
19 of Management and Budget (2018).

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