

Opening Statement – Amy Foley, Executive Director of the Tri-State First Responder Peer Support Team

Good morning, esteemed members of the committee and Chairperson Cirino.

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony on the State Budget HB 96.

Our request is simple yet impactful. We urge the State to invest \$200,000 in each fiscal year of the next budget cycle for our First Responder Peer Support development and training programs as proposed in the House Budget.

**The Need**

This investment gives lifesaving skills to first responders. They save them themselves or another member of their department. Research indicates that 46.8% of fire fighters have suicidal ideation, 29.2% have suicide plans, and 15.5% have suicide attempts. This is at a higher rate than the general population which is around 5.6-14.3%, 3.9%, and 1.9-8.7% respectively (Streeb et al., 2019). Law enforcement officers face a 54% higher risk of dying by suicide (Violanti & Steege, 2021), underscoring the critical need for comprehensive wellness programs and support services that are culturally competent.

Research has found that law enforcement experience an average of 3.5 traumatic events for each six months they serve. In a 30-year career, that adds up to over 200% more traumatic experiences than the average person will have in their lifetime. **Studies also show that the risk of developing PTSD or other similar mental health conditions is 25.6 times higher for public safety officers than the general public.**

These crucial events can include responding to domestic violence, serious crimes including crimes against children, gruesome injuries, dead bodies, rescues from fires and car crashes, and more. They are also seeing an increase of violence toward the first responders themselves.

Recently, a first responder department called us to support them when one of their fire fighters suffered a physical emergency at a drug store in their own jurisdiction. The first responders who entered the Walgreens to assist them were the colleagues they worked with each day. Can you imagine giving aid to a co-worker not knowing if they will live or die? Can you imagine transporting them in the same ambulance where they rendered lifesaving care just a few hours before?



I am thankful to say this firefighter lived. Here is the message from their Chief about the impact of the Tri-State Peer Support Team (Because this is a public document, names are not given to protect privacy):

*"I would like to offer my highest recommendation for continued funding of the TSPST. Over the past 14 months, the XXX Fire Department has called on TSPST twice to assist our employees after witnessing near-unthinkable tragedies, including one that affected me personally. The immediate response of the team, along with the care and compassion they showed, truly helped the healing process both in the short term and long term.*

*In a time when recruiting and retaining public safety employees has become increasingly challenging, providing mental health support and wellness is more important today than ever in my 31-year career."*

The Tri-State Peer Support Team was founded because of crisis' in our region including two Line of Duty Deaths. We know how to respond to a crisis. Over the past few years, our mission has changed from responding in crisis to offering training on prevention and early intervention. That is the impact of the funding you gave us in the previous budget. People are seeking help before their careers, families and lives are destroyed. They are hearing the message and getting help.

Building awareness about prevention and early intervention can be very fun and exciting and a few of our trainings exemplified that. We sponsored Ashley Ferris to speak about her Officer involved shooting and attendees rated her presentation 5 out of 5 stars. Two quotes from the Ashley Ferris event:

*"One of the most important and impactful trainings I have ever been too."*

*"Every law enforcement officer should attend this training."*

In 2024, in addition to speakers:

- We organized 47 trainings with over 1000 attendees.
- We had contact with over 100 departments.
- We have responded to a request for support after critical incidents 54 times.
- Vetted Culturally Competent Clinicians, in-patient, and out-patient facilities.
- **Saved 5 lives with our Red Alert Suicide Awareness Campaign.**

*"I didn't know it was this easy to get help"* First Responder, Cincinnati, OH

First Responders call the Tri-State Peer Support Team for themselves and their departments. Our team of trained peers know the job because they do the job. They show up. They listen.



They support connections to clinical treatment. They remove guns from first responders so they don't take their own life. They say, "I have been there too. I know what you are going through."

And they do know.

When we improve mental health and wellness, and build resilience in first responders, the impact will be felt at home. We represent the families of first responders who carry a different burden, but they serve alongside their spouses. They serve alongside their parents. Attached is an essay written by the daughter of the Fire Chief who responded the night Dep. Bill Brewer was murdered. She was 10 years old when the event happened. She wrote an essay for her high school English Class. That day haunts many of us. Here is a snippet of her perspective:

*"My Dad's job was dangerous. My Dad's job haunted the both of us, it seemed. I feared all the possible outcomes and he became so worn down because of his occupation. I could curse his job over and over until my voice was hoarse, but I knew he would never leave it. He loved helping people and he adored his coworkers more. Deputy Bill Brewer's death marked a turning point in my perspective, however, and while I will be eternally grateful that my Dad was not the one life lost in the line of duty that day, time has struck a chord with me. The value of time really does ring more important when one doesn't know how much of it they have left."*

We want to give our first responders the chance to make every moment the best it can be- not overshadowed by traumatic images, isolation, and drinking too much alcohol to forget. We want them to have the chance to retire and live more than an average of 5 years post-retirement

## **The Solution**

**The Tri-State Peer Support Team** is a resource that is trusted by first responder departments because we do the job. Our team has the credibility to build peer support in departments and respond to crisis. Our collaborative approach encourages departments and peer supporters to participate. How do we do this:

- Peer Support Training in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code. On-going training for ORC Peer Support Certification Compliance. We serve law enforcement, corrections officers, dispatchers, fire fighters, EMS, park rangers and AirCare.
- Evaluation and Data collection to show the impact of our efforts (See Red Alert Impact analysis).
- Regional point of reference for departments to understand training opportunities, ORC Compliance, and clinical resources. No one is siloed and developing programs on their own which saves time and money for departments.



- Developing cultural competence in EAP's, sleep centers, clinicians, and other treatment providers so they understand first responder culture.
- In-patient crisis treatment process development with Good Sam Hospital for suicidal first responders. (See Good Sam Room 16 Protocol)
- Weekly Peer Support educational opportunities to improve peer support skills including: weekly clinical consultation, opportunities to meet treatment providers, and peer support development discussions. These trainings include Trauma Informed Care Principles and Best Practices for Peer Support. (Toolbox Tuesday Flier)
- Giving trained Peer Supporters access to Peer Connect App with local resources, skills development and learning videos.
- Building County Teams in our smaller areas. Sharing culturally competent clinical resources and how to access them via Telehealth.
- Crisis support and response which includes peer supporters, clinicians, chaplains and pet therapy.
- Oversight from Board Members and Chiefs Advisory Council.

### **The Impact on Ohio**

Healthy First Responders perform at the highest standards in their communities. Our region is a leader in developing, building and sustaining peer support in first responder departments. Our innovation means we bring in trainers and speakers that are on the forefront of peer support concepts and wellness programs. These excite our first responders and they bring new ideas back to their departments. Changing ideas and assumptions changes cultures at departments improving the mental health and wellness.

- Our 2024 Achievements are attached. The back page is a list of the departments and Associations that support our efforts.
- Our training goal in 2025 is to increase engagement at the department level and the regional level. We estimate training impact on 1500 – 2000 first responders and directly working with 150 departments.
- Increased help seeking in by first responders because more departments are building peer support.
- Normalizing seeking help saving careers, lives and families.

### **Closing Statement**



The Tri-State Peer Support Team funding is a strategic investment in the safety of our communities. The cost to replace a first responder that leaves his/her job is estimated to be between \$150,000 and \$200,000.00. Our funding is equivalent to about 1 first responder employee. If we use the statistics of the 5 lives we saved:  $5 \times \$150,000$  (the cost to replace a trained responder) = \$750,000.00 saved by departments in the year. The monetary impact of these lives saved over the course of their career and the impact on the family, because they are still alive, is immeasurable. We respectfully ask for your support of \$200,000 per fiscal year to continue and expand this vital program. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Email: [firstresponderps@gmail.com](mailto:firstresponderps@gmail.com)

Website: [tsfirstresponderpst.org](http://tsfirstresponderpst.org)



*At TSPST our focus is on providing first responders the tools and resources they need to create a strong peer support foundation within their departments and communities.*

*2024 was a year of growth with many successes along the way. Take a look at what we were able to achieve in the past year.*

## Board Structure and Development

For continued success, TSPST evaluated how we are structured. The changes we made in 2024 will better serve local and regional First Responders.

- By-Laws adopted
- Code of Ethics adopted
- Records Retention Policy adopted
- Restructure the Board and developed a Chiefs Advisory Committee; Added two new chiefs
- Federal Grant Systems updated
- State AG Nonprofit info up to date
- 2024 and 2025 Budget approved and reviewed by Board. Audit Pending.

## Trainings

2024 was a great year for building TSPST's Peer Support Training. Along with developing new opportunities, we were able to bring in nationally recognized speakers

- Started Monthly Clinical Consultation. Considered a Peer Support Best Practice
- Ashley Ferris - October 2024 and Feb 2025
- David Griffin - October 2024
- 5 months Red Alert Suicide Awareness Campaign- Peer Support trainers, 27 Departments, over 340 attendees
- Created Peer Support Development Cohort
- Supported IAFF Peer Support Training
- Partnered with local Clinicians to provide EMS CEU's and Officer CPT credits
- 10 LEO attended IACP Wellness Conference

## Peer Support Growth

The past year was one of growth. We continued to offer new avenues of support throughout our community. Personal connections, implementing technologies, and developing programs that are relevant to their peer support efforts.

- Brown County Peer Support Trainings and Team development
- Clermont County Peer Support Teams
- Data Collection process started
- Good Sam ER Room 16 Protocol First Responder in Crisis Protocol ensures privacy
- Sponsorship of No Ky Symposium and the Brothers Helping Brothers
- Lighthouse App for all First Responders
- Peer Connect App for trained Peer Supporters
- 96 Public Safety Departments in 5 Counties Impacted
- Trauma Training for first responders. impact of understanding trauma in community.
- EAP relationships to develop culturally competent clinicians
- 3 year Peer Support Data Collection with DOJ Grant - begins 5/2025
- Jan - Dec 55 crisis callouts
- Refined Crisis Support Process
- Vetted clinicians and treatment centers for cultural competency

## Peer Support Associates

In 2024, TSPST was able to expand our team. By adding two Peer Support Associates, they know the job because they do the job. They serve our First Responders by meeting the growing requests to implement Peer Support within departments. Our impact is growing.

# Departments Supporting Budget Request

## **Hamilton County**

Blue Ash Police Department  
Blue Ash Fire Department  
Green Township Fire Department  
Colerain Fire Department  
Harrison, OH Fire Department  
Colerain Police Department  
Sharonville Police Department  
Sharonville Fire Department  
North College Hill Police Dept  
North College Hill Fire Dept  
Forest Park Fire Department  
Springdale Fire Department  
Loveland Police Department  
Whitewater Twp Fire Dept  
Miami Twp Fire Dept  
Madeira Indian Hill Joint Fire District  
Miami Twp Fire Dept  
Whitewater Township Fire Dept  
Norwood Fire Department  
Woodlawn Fire Department  
Evendale Fire Department  
Delhi Fire Department  
Cheviot Fire Department  
Green Hills Fire Dept.  
Reading Fire Dept.  
St. Bernard Fire Dept  
Hamilton County Communications Center  
Milford Police Department  
Norwood Police Department

## **Associations**

Clermont County Fire Chiefs  
Brown County Fire Chiefs  
Hamilton County Fire Chiefs  
Clermont County Police Chiefs

## **Brown County**

Byrd Township Fire Dept  
Eastern Joint Fire Dept  
Mt. Orab Fire Dept  
Higginsport Fire and EMS  
Hamersville Fire and EMS  
Brown County Sheriff  
Mt. Orab Police Dept  
Georgetown Police Dept  
Georgetown Fire Department  
Brown County Communications Center  
Brown County Sheriff's Department  
Ripley Fire and EMS

## **Clermont County**

Miami Twp Fire Dept  
Miami Twp Police Dept  
Bethel Police Department  
Bethel Fire Department  
Monroe Twp Fire Department  
Central Joint Fire Department  
Milford Fire Dept  
Milford Police Depart  
Clermont County Sheriff Dept  
Pierce Twp Fire Dept  
Pierce Twp Police Dept  
Monroe Twp FD  
New Richmond Police Dept  
Batavia Police Dept  
Wayne Township Fire Dept  
Stonelick Township Fire Dept  
Goshen Twp Fire Dept  
Goshen Twp Police Dept  
Union Township Fire Dept  
Union Twp Police Dept  
Williamsbug Public Safety  
Clermont County Communications Center

## **Butler County**

Hamilton Police Department  
Butler County Sheriff's Department  
Butler County Coroner

List as of May 16, 2025



# GOOD SAMARITAN HOSPITAL FIRST RESPONDER CRISIS PROTOCOL

Good Samaritan Hospital has partnered with the Tri-State Peer Support Team to create a protocol for first responders who are suicidal or experiencing a mental health crisis. ROOM 16 Protocol.

Clinicians are invited to meet with the Good Sam staff to learn about this crisis treatment option. This protocol is an option for a first responder who is suicidal or experiencing a mental health crisis and need crisis care.



## Training Details

- Dr Erica Birkley presentation about suicide, common warning signs, and how peer supporters can work with someone who is in crisis.
- Bill Hawkins, MBA, BSN, RN Good Sam Hospital Emergency Department Nurse Manager will discuss the crisis protocol, referrals to next levels of care and ensuring privacy for first responders using the protocol.
- Walk through the process and how to access the protocol.



**Scan QR Code  
to SIGN UP.**

**Date:** May 30, 2025

**Time:** 9:00 am-11:00 am

**Where:** Cranley Room, Good Samaritan Hospital,  
375 Dixmyth Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45220

How to get to the Cranley Room:

- Park in the Dixmyth Parking Lot on Dixmyth Ave.
- Enter the Dixmyth Lobby
- Walk straight to the Dixmyth Elevators
- Take elevators to the 3rd floor
- Exit to the main hallway outside of the elevators
- Follow the signs

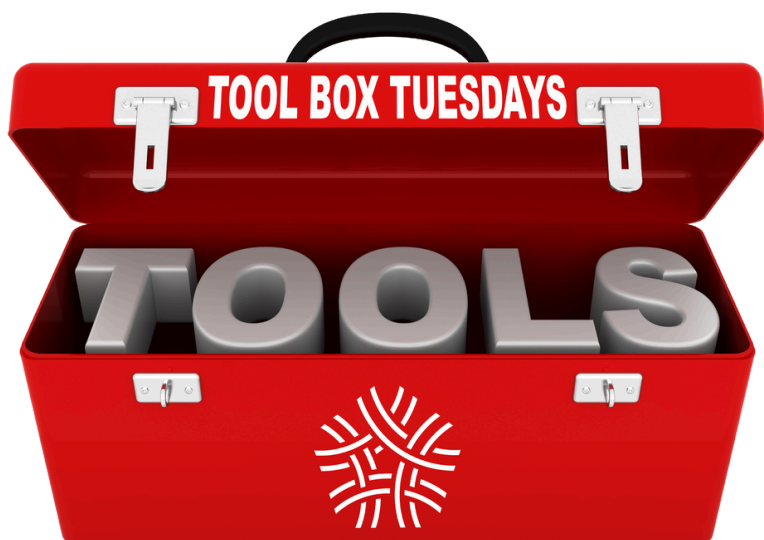
**Questions? Contact**

**Amy Foley** - firstresponderps@gmail.com  
or 513-607-9290



**TRI-STATE  
PEER SUPPORT TEAM**





*In 2025, TSPST is adding to it's Peer Support trainings:  
Tool Box Tuesdays will be weekly meetings,  
from 12 p.m. - 1:00 p.m., via Zoom. Each meeting is  
designed to provide more tools to enrich your peer  
support skill set.*

***Seminars each month will include:***

**Week 1:** Peer Support 101

**Week 2:** Clinical Consultation

**Week 3:** Meet Your Treatment Provider

**Week 4:** Tactical TBT

**Week 5:** Financial Literacy  
(4/29, 7/29, and 9/30)



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PEER SUPPORT TEAM



# PeerConnect

## Reignite Your Role In Peer Support With The Tri-State Peer Support Team

### Stay Informed & Build Skills

Stay up to date with peer support-specific training opportunities, enhance your understanding of peer support work, and learn new skills or improve existing ones.



### Support & Connection

Participate in quarterly peer-to-peer check-ins to support one another while building meaningful relationships with Peer Supporters across the region.

### Gain Access to Resources

Gain fast access to updated lists of vetted clinical resources. have them at your fingertips when you need them most.



***Trained Peers should scan the QR code to register for an information session and how to download the app.***

**Questions?** Contact Amy Foley  
**email:** [firstresponderps@gmail.com](mailto:firstresponderps@gmail.com)  
**phone:** 513-607-9290



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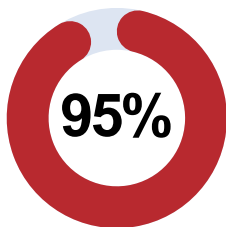
## TSPST RED ALERT 2024 SUMMARY

*Red Alert was created in 2024 to address Suicide Awareness within the First Responder community. In the program's first year, Red Alert quickly became a valued resource of our region's First Responders.*

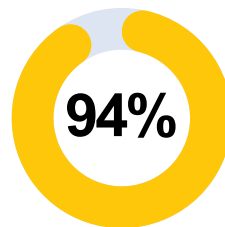
*Data collected from September 1, 2024 to January 24, 2025  
26 Departments (15 Fire Departments and 11 Law Enforcement) in Brown, Clermont, Hamilton and Butler Counties participated in the training.*

### What First Responders Say About Red Alert

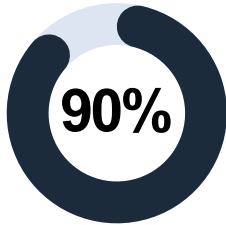
Addressing suicide prevention with actionable advice.



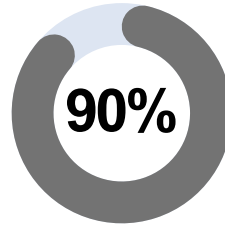
95% would **recommend** the training **to their colleagues**



94% **acquired actionable steps** to apply daily



90% know **how to ask someone** about suicide

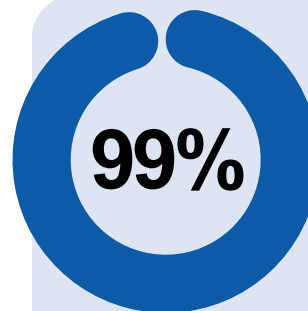


90% know how to **access local resources**



93% felt **confident they could help** someone in crisis

*\*332 First Responders surveyed gave the training 4.64 stars out of 5.*



99% anticipated that the **training will help** them with someone who may be suicidal.

*\*This translates to nearly 10 out of 10 people predicting the training will help them help someone.*

#### Additional Valued Comments:

- "Personal Stories Make an Impact"
- "Resources Are Highly Valued"
- "Engaging and Knowledgeable Presenters Matter"
- "Open Discussion Enhances Learning"
- "First Responder-Specific Focus Is Essential"
- "Emphasis on mental health resources and practical guidance."

**Take Care of Each Other.**



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