



Plain Township Fire Department

9500 Johnstown Road, New Albany, Ohio 43054

Phone: 614.855.7370 Fax: 614.855.9972

www.plaintownship.org

An Equal Opportunity Employer

April 2, 2022

Chairman Hilyar
Vice Chair Grendell
Ranking Member Golonski
Re: Ohio House Bill 545

House Civil Justice Committee,

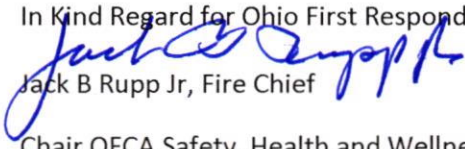
I am writing to express our strong and full support of H.B.545. to allow privileged communication for Peer Supporters and First Responders on behalf of the OFCA Safety, Health and Wellness Committee.

In 2018 three Ohio-based associations—the Ohio Fire Chiefs' Association (OFCA), the Ohio Association of Professional Fire Fighters (OAPFF), and the Ohio State Firefighters Association (OSFA)—partnered to assess the prevalence of behavioral health and/or emotional issues among firefighters and EMS professionals in Ohio.

With the cooperation of the ODPS Division of EMS all first responders holding Ohio Certifications in EMS and Fire received a request to participate in a mental health and behavioral health survey. 7,652 responded making it the largest sample size in the US. One of the survey questions asked respondents to identify the signs and symptoms of PTS that they have experienced. One correlation revealed that 86% of the respondents had experienced one or more of the signs and symptoms of PTS at sometime during their career.

Peer Support Teams should be seen as and are the first step in preventing PTSD. Teams are designed to help with incident related stress and was expanded to address personal issues for first responders. First responders are likely to direct incident related stress inward. Not managing stress appropriately can and has led to many personal issues. Many first responders are cautious about sharing because of implications of being weak, and potential job loss if they indicate they have suicidal thoughts. *Privileged communication is an extremely important piece between team members and responders seeking assistance, it will help to eliminate the stigma associated with behavioral health issues and allow them to communicate with a trained responder before an issue compounds itself.* House Bill 545 deserves the support of all legislators to aid in the mental health of Ohio First Responders.

In Kind Regard for Ohio First Responder Mental Health.


Jack B Rupp Jr, Fire Chief

Chair OFCA Safety, Health and Wellness Committee

Plain Township Fire Department