



**THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY**  
**DIVISION OF FIRE**  
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March 31, 2022

Chairman Hillyer  
Vice Chair Grendell  
Ranking Member Galonski

Re: Ohio House Bill 545

House Civil Justice Committee,

I am writing to express my strong and full support of H.B.545. to allow privileged communication for peer supporters and first responders.

As a first responder for more than thirty years, I have seen my share of difficult emergency scenes. In 2019, there was 189 police/ firefighter line of duty deaths. What is even more staggering is the three hundred and fifty-eight suicides in the same year. Peer support teams were designed to help with incident related stress and was expanded to address personal issues for first responders. First responders have always kept incident related stress to themselves. Not managing stress appropriately can and has led to many personal issues including increased alcohol and drug use, anger issues, and divorce just to name a few. Many first responders are cautious about sharing because of implications of being weak, and potential job loss if they indicate they have suicidal thoughts.

Peer support is a way to help first responders stay mentally fit and ready to serve our community. H.B.545 will help to allow privileged communications between team members and will help to eliminate the stigma associated with behavioral health issues.

First responders have always been here to serve in good times and in bad, now is a time when you can give back. Please support House Bill 545.

Very Respectfully,

Richard A Vober  
Deputy Chief  
Akron Fire Department