

Association of Cleveland Fire Fighters

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Senator Manning,

I am a lifelong Ohio resident, Marine Corps Veteran, Lieutenant on the Cleveland Division of Fire, and Secretary for the Association of Cleveland Fire Fighters IAFF Local 93. I am standing today in support of HB 545 which if passed will extend confidentiality to peer support team members.

In 2021 the Cleveland Division of Fire sadly lost two members to suicide. While I considered them both friends, I was much closer to the second firefighter we lost. I worked with him for a long time to help him and keep him fighting through one day at a time. Despite countless hours on the phone, in the fire station, at his house and even bringing him to my home, I was unable to save him. He was a father of three young children, a son, brother, husband and friend to many.

On October 9th 2021 my friend and fellow firefighter did not show up to work. I immediately jumped in my car and drove out to his house, stopping only to grab another friend and firefighter along the way because I did not know what was going on and had a feeling I could use some help. When we arrived, the door was locked so we climbed in an open upstairs window. We found our friend in his kitchen. After the coroner left we stayed to clean up what the coroner left behind. I will never forget those images and how I felt that day.

With the support of the IAFF and OAPFF, the Association of Cleveland Fire Fighters started a Peer Support team here in Cleveland. I am a peer support team member and one of the founders of our Cleveland team. One reason I am standing behind HB 545 is because when I was trying to help my friend, his former wife attempted to subpoena me to testify against him. No one who is trying to save the life of a friend should ever be placed in a situation where they are faced with the threat of subpoena.

In the Marines I served as Scout Sniper Team Leader for the 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. To me the fight to keep our friends alive today is as real as it was during my deployment to Afghanistan. In 2010 my battalion lost 17 marines and countless more were severely injured. I still receive calls from team mates struggling to cope with the friends we lost and the people we killed. There was a time I thought I could put on blinders and try to forget everything and everyone who reminded me of the hurt. However, by the grace of God I now accept this fight as mine and it is one I will not back down from. We can still make a difference and it starts by providing confidentiality to our team mates, police officers, corrections officers, EMT's, paramedics, and firefighters.

Affiliations: IAFF • AFL-CIO • OAPFF • OHIO AFL-CIO

We cannot bring our friends back but we can continue to fight for the friends we still have. When it comes to Peer Support and helping members work through the tragedies they face in the line of duty, **trust is everything**. In order to maintain this trust and give our members the support they need, we must pass this legislation. We cannot do it without your support.

The second Cleveland firefighter we lost in 2021 lived in Sheffield, Ohio, and was a constituent of the 13th Ohio Senate District. I would like to think it is more than chance this Bill has come to your committee. Please know that sharing my personal story to include my personal struggles is not something I like to do. I am doing it because I believe we have an opportunity here to implement a change for the better. No one should have to face the threat of subpoena when trying to help a friend, especially when you are acting in an official capacity and working with EAP representatives and other health care providers. In the fire service we develop a bond that is much closer than other professions; this is why we are often referred to as a brotherhood. Please help me to support my brother and sister firefighters by passing HB 545.

In Unity,



Joseph A. (Jake) Konys
Secretary, IAFF Local 93

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