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The Honorable Claire Cronin
Massachusetts House of Representatives
Chair, Joint Committee on the Judiciary
24 Beacon St.
Room 136
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz
Massachusetts House of Representatives
Chair, House Ways & Means Committee
24 Beacon Street
Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairs Cronin and Michlewitz,

My name is Robert Swartz and I am a resident of Lakeville, Massachusetts. I am in my 31st year working in law enforcement. I have served as a patrolman, a K-9 handler, and currently am a Detective with the Taunton Police Department and the Director of the Southeastern Massachusetts Law Enforcement Councils (SEMLEC) Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) / Peer Support Team. I am writing to you today to request your support of Section 78 of House Bill #2820 Critical Incident Stress Management and Peer Support Programs. To be transparent, I do not support this bill in its entirety, and have already seen the increasing stress it has caused on Law Enforcement. However, I do commend the Senate for introducing the topic of Police Stress Management as a vital part of reform and support for officers. The implementation of Critical Incident Stress Management and Peer Support Programs is very personal to me.

Eight years ago, I was involved in a shooting, while at work. I was forced to discharge my weapon in defense of my own life and the lives of my community members. Though I had been through countless tactical and professional trainings on how to protect my life and others, nothing prepared me for the aftermath and impact this incident would have on me or my family. That day was life changing. Most, unless they too have been through an officer involved shooting, cannot comprehend the overwhelming stress and physiological changes your body and mind go through. I myself had not been prepared for what the days and weeks following would be like. Unfortunately, there was no Police Critical Incident Support Team in my area at that time, after all, officer involved shootings are not a daily event in our region. Fortunately, with the guidance of a fellow officer I was put in touch with the Boston Police Peer Support Unit. Within days I was connected to a group of Peers and Clinicians who helped me, my wife, and my children weed through our emotions and cope with our new norm. Have you ever had to

explain to your child that you took another person's life? Or explain to your family your need to go back to work after nearly being killed yourself? Peer Support was instrumental in providing us the tools we needed to communicate effectively with our children, teach us how to navigate our emotions, and provide a stable environment both at home and at school to lessen the impact this would have on our lives.

Since that time it became important to me, along with the support of the Southeastern Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council, we establish a Critical Incident Peer Support Unit. Over the last few years our team has conducted over 115 one-on-one peer support sessions, debriefed 30 critical incidents, diffused 32 critical incidents, made 18 trips to mental health facilities that offer programs specific to law enforcement officers, and provided support at 3 officer suicide and 1 line of duty death funerals, as well as sponsored a 2 day wellness symposium attended by over 300 officers. Local agencies already have individual and regional Peer Support and Critical Incident Stress Management Units. The Massachusetts State Peer Support Network oversees several multidiscipline teams, Boston Police have an established Peer Support Unit, Massachusetts State Police have a Stress Unit and several of the Law Enforcement Councils (Southeastern Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council, Metro Law Enforcement Council...) have well established regional teams. These team members are officers from throughout the region and are well versed in assisting officers with mental wellness. And it is still not enough! Currently, there are departments not participating and therefore, their officers are not receiving services.

I feel it is important to get in front of these incidents in Law Enforcement by ensuring Mental Wellness Practices become part of the daily trainings of officers. Training, that is not currently mandatory, should become a requirement. The National Institute of Justice states that an officer, on average nationwide, will be subjected to three traumatic events every six months. Put into perspective that just one critical incident could spiral a person into a lifetime of depression, substance abuse and struggle, yet Police Officers deal with these traumas routinely. To illustrate the point, a police officer with marital problems and financial struggles, whose family stress is compounded by shift work and lack of ability to be present at home or assist in child care. The officer now copes with this real-life situation by drinking and isolating himself. One can see how the combination of all these stressors can significantly affect how an officer responds or behaves. Without a proper outlet, awareness, education, healthy coping mechanisms, and training to relieve the stress and grow through life events, the likelihood of a negative outcome with the community is inevitable.

In closing, I respectfully request that you recognize the importance of, and support support Section 78 of House Bill #2820 Critical Incident Stress Management and Peer Support Teams. Please feel free to reach out to me if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,
Robert A. Swartz
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