

07/16/2020

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 James Creed and I am a resident of Bridgewater, Massachusetts and a proud law enforcement officer of 15 years. Presently, I serve as a Lieutenant with the Plymouth County Sheriff's Department and I am assigned to the K9 Unit. I am writing you today in support of Section 78 of S.2820 ("Critical Incident Stress Management and Peer Support Programs").

In reading Senate 2820, it has become clear to me that the many of your colleagues are unaware of the toll that being involved in a critical incident (e.g. an officer involved shooting) takes on an officer's physical/mental health. Sadly, it seems that some of you have been led to believe that when an officer is forced to take a life (in defense of themselves or others) they feel either nothing or worse yet that they receive some kind of pleasure from it. Having been personally involved in an OIS (Officer Involved Shooting), I can assure you that nothing could be further from the truth.

On May 10, 2016, while off duty and enjoying a night out with my wife I was involved in a critical incident. That evening, I was forced to discharge my firearm in order to stop an assailant from brutally stabbing a waitress in the Bertucci's restaurant at the Taunton Galleria Mall. While many people are familiar with the events of that day, most are not aware of the role that critical incident stress debriefing and peer support played in my recovery. Immediately following the shooting, I contacted my direct supervisor (Capt. M. Correia) by telephone and I informed him of what had transpired. Subsequently, Captain Correia contacted Taunton PD Officer Robert Swartz (now a Detective) and he requested that the SEMLEC Critical Incident Stress Team be activated.

Once the scene of the shooting was secured, my wife Laura and I were transported to Taunton Police headquarters. Upon our arrival at the PD, we were placed in a small interview room to await the arrival of TPD detectives. While we waited in that room we began calling our families to let them know what had occurred and to tell them that we were both physically ok. During this time, reality began to set in and our stress levels were very high.

Thankfully, Detective Swartz arrived at the PD within the hour and took us to a more comfortable and private space where we could talk. At that time, Detective Swartz explained to us that we should go to the hospital to be evaluated for stress and he persuaded me to make an appointment for Laura and I to meet with a peer support counselor from the Boston Police Peer Support Unit later that week.

There is a false perception in the general public that police officers simply return to work and go on with their duties as if nothing happened immediately following an OIS. Consequently, I feel that it is my duty to share my story in order to educate people and put an end to that myth. The morning after my OIS, our home was filled with family and friends who came by to offer my wife and I support in our time of need. However, once our guests left, I spent the majority of that day lying on my bathroom floor doubled over in pain due to severe cramping and fatigue. Since that time, I have learned that those symptoms were a direct result of my body producing a surge of adrenaline as part of its fight or flight response the previous night.

On the Friday following the OIS, Laura and I traveled to Boston and we had our first (of many) meetings with a Peer Support Counselor from the Boston Police Department Peer Support Unit. As a typical type A personality, I was skeptical of meeting with the counselor and discussing my feelings in the open. However, once we arrived at the Peer Support building we were met by a Boston Police Officer who had been in an officer involved shooting several years prior along with a counselor (social worker). The counselor began our session by having the officer introduce himself and tell us about his experience. This set me at ease and allowed me to begin to trust the process. Once we left our first session, I felt like a massive weight had been lifted from my shoulders and for the first time in several days my adrenaline began to return to a normal level.

The assistance I received from both the SEMLEC Critical incident Stress Team and the Boston Police Peer Support Unit was critical in helping me adjust back to my normal life and ultimately return to work. Therefore, I respectfully ask that Section 78 of S.2820 (“Critical Incident Stress Management and Peer Support Programs”) be included in the final draft of this legislation, so that we can work together to ensure that all officers involved in critical incidents receive the help that they so desperately need.

Thank you for taking the time to listen my concerns. If you have any questions, I would be happy to meet with you or your colleagues to discuss them at your convenience. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

James M. Creed

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