



MHANYS
Mental Health Association
in New York State



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

Supporting First Responders' Mental Health

Pass the First Responder Peer Support Program Act (A.7285-A/S.5407-A)

Background

First responders—including firefighters, law enforcement, EMS personnel, corrections officers, 9-1-1 dispatchers, probation and parole officers, coroners/medical examiners, and others—face daily exposure to traumatic events. New York State is home to over 200,000 first responders across more than 6,300 agencies statewide, including:

- 1,779 EMS agencies
- 532 law enforcement agencies
- 1,640 career and volunteer fire departments with 2,413 fire stations

A 2024 statewide needs assessment found:

- 80% reported negative impacts on home life from their work
- 79% reported impacts on physical health
- 72% reported strain on family and interpersonal relationships
- 16% reported suicidal thoughts—four times higher than the general population (SAMHSA)
- 90%+ said peer support groups and individual therapy, if free and accessible, would improve their mental health

These findings mirror national research showing that first responders are at elevated risk for depression, PTSD, substance misuse, and suicide. In fact, studies suggest police and firefighters may be more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty.

The First Responder Peer Support Program Act (A.7285-A/S.5407-A)

The legislation establishes a statewide grant program administered by the Office of Mental Health (OMH) to fund peer-to-peer mental health programs for first responders in every county.

- **Eligibility:** Fire, police, EMS, corrections, dispatch, probation/parole, coroners, forest rangers, court officers, and others, including volunteer-based organizations.
- **Training Standards:** Evidence-based, trauma-informed training covering resilience, suicide prevention, general mental health literacy, and addiction and recovery supports.
- **Confidentiality:** Communications are protected from disclosure, ensuring responders can seek help without fear of stigma or professional repercussions.
- **No Record-Keeping:** Programs may not collect or report personal identifying information of participants.
- **Accountability:** Annual reports to OMH (aggregate only, no personal data) with recommendations for future funding and program changes to ensure the most effective peer support.

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Talking Points:

- ✓ Across disciplines, including law enforcement, fire, EMS, corrections, dispatch, probation, and parole, and other frontline responder roles, there is shared recognition that peer support saves lives, strengthens families, and sustains the workforce that protects New York.
- ✓ Over 200,000 first responders across New York urgently need dedicated peer support.
- ✓ First responders cannot be expected to absorb trauma daily and “just go home.”
- ✓ Peer support programs are proven effective—connecting responders with trained peers who share their experiences in a trusted, confidential setting.
- ✓ This program is modeled after the successful PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Peer Support Program, which has demonstrated the effectiveness of peer-to-peer models across New York State.
- ✓ Confidentiality provisions are central—no records, no career repercussions.
- ✓ The recently passed Joseph Banish Bill only protects confidentiality for police, leaving out peace officers, corrections, EMS, fire, and other first responder disciplines—this bill closes that gap.
- ✓ This Act creates a statewide, evidence-based standard while respecting local control.
- ✓ Federal research and best practices show systemic, peer-led support are essential to responder wellness.
- ✓ The program will save lives, strengthen families, and improve career and volunteer workforce retention.

Legislative Request

The Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc., American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Firefighters Association of the State of New York, New York State Sheriffs’ Institute, New York State Sheriffs’ Association, New York State Association of Fire Chiefs, Association of Fire Districts, New York State Fire Coordinators, Concerns of Police Survivors Empire State NY Chapter, New York State Volunteer Ambulance & Rescue Association, New York State Conference of Local Mental Hygiene Directors, and New York State Association for Rural Health urge the passage and enactment of this legislation. New York State has the opportunity to lead the nation in supporting those who protect and serve our communities.



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