



# Office of the City Clerk

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## Legislation Text

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### RESOLUTION 1\*VA\

WHEREAS, suicide is a public health issue that affects people from all backgrounds and its ^/j\ impact is far-reaching both emotionally and psychologically, affecting families, friends, coworkers, and communities; and

WHEREAS, though the physical safety and wellness of law enforcement officers is paramount to all local and state governments, the mental health and well-being of officers fails to receive the same attention and resources within the world of officer safety; and

WHEREAS, suicides leave more officers and firefighters dead than all line-of-duty deaths combined across the nation; and

WHEREAS, according to a recent study by the Ruderman Family Foundation, there were 103 firefighters and 140 police officers nationwide known to have committed suicide in 2017; and

WHEREAS, three Chicago police officers have fallen victim to suicide over a two-month span in 2018; and

WHEREAS, today the national average of suicides throughout the United States is 13 per 100,000 individuals; and

WHEREAS, for police across the United States, the average number of suicides is 17 per 100,000 officers; and

WHEREAS, within the ranks of the Chicago Police Department ("CPD"), the number of police suicides is between 22 and 29 per 100,000 officers according to recent report by the Department of Justice; and

WHEREAS, the report also revealed that the officer-suicide rate in Chicago may be 60% higher than elsewhere in the United States; and

WHEREAS, CPD currently directs officers struggling with mental health to either the Professional Counseling Division/Employee Assistance Program, the peer-to-peer support program, or chaplain's services; and

WHEREAS, CPD's Employee Assistance Program ("EAP") is available to all department members and their immediate families and will soon have a total of 10 counselors to assist officers; and

WHEREAS, in the event other officers or supervisors sense trouble with a colleague, those officers may contact EAP to reach out to the particular officer, and supervisors can subsequently mandate a visit; and

WHEREAS, CPD's peer support network is made up of officers who have endured similar struggles with depression or challenges with the job, and allows a place for officers currently struggling with mental health to speak in confidence; and

WHEREAS, while these services are necessary to help those troubled officers, there are 12,000 sworn members of CPD and so few counselors trained to address these types of health care matters; and

WHEREAS, in a recent consent decree, the Department of Justice required the development of a CPD program for officers to address suicide prevention by January 2020 as part of an effort to expand counseling services; and

WHEREAS, since then, CPD has created two peer support positions to assist officers with their mental health needs and assure them that there are no repercussions for seeking help; and

WHEREAS, in August 2018, Governor Bruce Rauner signed the Law Enforcement Support Program Confidentiality Act which allows police officers throughout Illinois to seek mental health treatment without jeopardizing their career; and

WHEREAS, the Act provides that a police agency cannot make a Firearm Owners Identification ("FOID") card a condition of continued employment if the card is temporarily revoked because of inpatient mental health treatment, absent the officers not posing a danger to themselves or others; and

WHEREAS, by encouraging police officers to seek mental health treatment for the trauma they experience as part of their duty to keep the public safe, Illinois has recognized mental health as a real priority for police agencies like CPD to expand upon; and

WHEREAS, while it is clear that CPD needs to address the issue of mental health within the department, the mental health of all first responders in Chicago should be a real priority moving forward; and

WHEREAS, each and every day, paramedics in Chicago witness the perils of humanity; and

WHEREAS, more than 2,100 people have been shot in Chicago in 2018, and almost every time, paramedics arrive on the scene, attempting to save a life; and

WHEREAS, at every horrific traffic accident, each time a teenager falls victim to a heroin overdose, or when someone is severely burned in a fire, paramedics respond to the call to help save a life; and

WHEREAS, the Chicago Sun-Times recently reported that there is currently no medically trained mental health expert such as a psychiatrist or psychologist employed full-time by the Chicago Fire Department ("CFD") to monitor the well-being of paramedics; and

WHEREAS, additionally, there is no mandatory class or significant training to help paramedics identify the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder ("PTSD") or guide CFD supervisors on how to deal with paramedics suffering from such symptoms; and

WHEREAS, CFD employs two trained clinical social workers full-time to provide guidance to more than 5,000 firefighters and paramedics; and

WHEREAS, neither of CFD's clinical social workers are trained in mental health care; and

WHEREAS, in order to identify first responders who may be struggling with their mental health, CFD relies heavily on self-reporting and peer counseling; and

WHEREAS, alternatively, CFD makes referrals to mental health experts outside of the department, but there is no data available to show how often such referrals occur; and

WHEREAS, with a stigma against admitting weakness, paramedics may fear that instances of self-reporting will ultimately be placed on their record and result in either termination or reassignment; and

WHEREAS, while there is no national research concerning the impact of stress on firefighters and paramedics, the lone study conducted on the impact of stress on CFD firefighters revealed 11 suicides over the span of 2 Vi years including a string of 7 suicides in just 18 weeks; and

WHEREAS, noting the priority that is a first responder's well-being, the Chicago City Council seeks to examine the mental health initiatives and resources currently in place within CPD and CFD and how it may support expanded efforts to protect the mental health of all first responders; and

WHEREAS, in doing so, this Council strives to reassure that their well-being will be protected just as they protect ours; now, therefore

**BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHICAGO:** that the Joint Committee of the Committee on Finance and the Committee on Public Safety hereby calls upon the Superintendent of the Chicago Police Department and the Fire Commissioner of the Chicago Fire Department to address the mental health and suicide prevention initiatives, both at work and in the future, within the respective Departments, and the impact of the Law Enforcement Support Program Confidentiality Act.

Edward M. Burke Alderman, 14<sup>th</sup> Ward