

Dept. of Justice: AG Kaul launches new officer wellness and peer support program statewide

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Justice is announcing today a new law enforcement mental health and wellness program supported through federal grant funding. The program kicked off this week with the first meeting of the statewide Peer Support Advisory Committee.

“As they protect public safety, law enforcement officers encounter difficult, and sometimes traumatic, circumstances,” said Attorney General Kaul. “Peer support and other wellness programs can provide assistance and should be available to officers throughout Wisconsin. This initiative will support and promote the development of those programs.”

Good mental and psychological health is just as essential as good physical health for law enforcement officers to be effective in keeping our communities safe from crime and violence. In 2019, there were 239 officer suicides in the United States, according to Blue H.E.L.P., a non-profit organization that tracks law enforcement suicides^[1]. This number represents suicides that have been reported. There are likely many more officer suicides that go unreported. It is estimated that twice as many law enforcement officers every year die by suicide than are killed in either traffic accidents or assaults.

Larger law enforcement agencies often have the funding and resources necessary to build internal peer support programs. With the vast majority of Wisconsin law enforcement agencies having 10 or fewer officers, the ability to provide funding for this training at the local level is a challenge for small agencies. The Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) would like to expand its training capabilities by

increasing the number of trained instructors for the Basic Peer Support course to reach a broader range of agencies in the state so that every agency can have the benefit of trained peer support staff as a foundational resource for their officers.

The Peer Support Advisory Committee – consisting of chiefs, sheriffs, psychologists, policy staff, other law enforcement officers from across Wisconsin – will provide the attorney general with recommendations from the law enforcement community and mental health professionals regarding the wellness and training needs for the law enforcement in Wisconsin. The committee will be responsible for producing a manual that will define the framework for developing and supporting regional peer support networks through the state of Wisconsin.

The program is supported through federal grant funding from the U.S. Department of Justice Community Oriented Police Services (COPS) with \$125,000 in funding. The grant funding will also support:

- The review and update of the current peer support training program and deliver more basic peer support trainings, in order to increase the number of trained peer supporters.
- DOJ instructors providing annual training for certification in Critical Incident and Stress Management.
- Regional re-training and continuing education for current peer support team members.
- An annual peer support conference.

Press release: <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/news-releases/ag--kaul-launches-new-officer-wellness-and-peer-support-program-statewide>