

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

CAMPBELL PARK

HOUSE FINANCE

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LEGISLATIVE BUDGET
AND AUDIT

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ETHICS (ALTERNATE)



DIMOND BUSINESS
DISTRICT

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EAST SAND LAKE

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MIDTOWN

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TAKU-CAMPBELL

REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON

Sponsor Statement for House Bill 15

HB 15 establishes the ability for law enforcement officers and first responders to seek mental health counseling regarding classified information without jeopardizing ongoing investigations. Under current law, public safety officers are extremely limited in their options to discuss stressful and traumatic events that occur in their workplace because they are often, by their nature, related to criminal investigations. HB 15 addresses the critical need to de-stigmatize mental health issues that affect many public safety officers by providing a safe and confidential way for them to talk about emotionally intense aspects of their work.

HB 15 does not mandate changes to existing agencies, but merely allows them to establish a peer support counseling program. A law enforcement agency, emergency service provider, or the Department of Corrections will have the opportunity to designate an existing employee as a peer counselor if they have prior counseling training. Any participant who seeks counseling from their designated peer is guaranteed confidentiality in those communications. Confidential space for participants to discuss emotionally traumatic events is key for creating effective Critical Incident Stress Management debriefs, which the United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration recognizes as crucial for preventing and mitigating the effects of trauma. The confidentiality created by the peer counseling program does not apply to any threats that the participant makes, and it does not apply to any admission of criminal conduct.

HB 15 will ultimately provide emotional relief and a path to healing for the Alaskans who bear the burden of protecting the public on a daily basis. I urge you to support HB 15.