



**Public Safety Employees Association, Inc.**  
***"Representing Alaska's Finest"***  
**A.F.S.C.M.E. Local 83**



February 7th, 2023

The Honorable Andy Josephson  
State of Alaska House of Representatives  
State Capitol Room 432  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

*Via email: Rep.Andy.Josephson@akleg.gov*

Re: Letter of Support for House Bill 15 *"Peer Support Counseling Program."*

Representative Josephson,

Thank you for your sponsorship of House Bill 15 - *'An Act Relating to Confidential Peer Support Volunteers'* and encourage you to pass this act. This bill would ensure that individuals trained in peer counseling may provide confidential mental health services in our state without fear of penalties or liability. Public Safety Employees Association (PSEA) is in full support of HB 15 as written.

Mental health issues are a growing concern among our law enforcement family, and last year, 2022, DPS alone had over 350 hours of peer-to-peer contacts. By providing access to qualified and certified professionals who can offer *confidential support*, we can help those dealing with depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse problems, and other issues specific to Public Safety and make progress towards better overall well-being, for those providing essential services to Alaskans. Furthermore, these volunteers will be able to give personalized attention while facilitating skills development as well as promotion of healthy behaviors for our front-line men and women – something that institutionalized programs cannot always offer due to limited resources.

Stigmas surrounding mental health have been slowly eroding over the past decade, and law enforcement officers are becoming more willing to be open about their own struggles in this area. However, one of the biggest issues that continues to prevent these individuals from seeking help is a lack of confidentiality: they fear their employers will discover what has been said between them and any professional counselor or peer member. The passage of HB 15 - *'An Act Relating to Confidential Peer Support Volunteers'* – would provide much-needed protection for law enforcement officers speaking with peers about mental health by ensuring that their revelations remain confidential. This could serve as an invaluable resource for these individuals who often struggle without support due to limited resources and a dearth of personalized attention. In addition, having access to confidential services can help officers avert crises before they happen, keeping themselves, their co-workers, and families healthier overall.

The passage of HB 15 will create an invaluable resource for Alaskans, specifically members of Public Safety seeking assistance with such sensitive topics as mental health concerns, addiction recovery, PTSD, anxiety needs; it is a crucial step towards addressing the need for more sustainable solutions within our law enforcement community's healthcare system. We urge you earnestly consider passing this important bill so that future generations of those choosing to serve in the law enforcement family and have easier access to quality care when they need it most.



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PSEA, or Public Safety Employees Association, Local 803 is a not-for-profit corporation that has effectively represented Alaska law enforcement personnel in a variety of labor and employment matters at the State and municipal levels since 1978. PSEA also asserts itself as a leader in issues having a direct impact on Alaska Public Safety services.

Our 800+ members are consummate professionals who take great pride in providing essential Public Safety services upon which the public depends. You will encounter PSEA members throughout the State of Alaska – from its busiest airports to its streets and highways, in dispatch centers, our Court rooms, from the turbulent high seas to the State's quiet streams and isolated trails, and the State's largest cities, and smallest rural villages.

Thank you again for continued support of Public Safety, we look forward in assisting with HB 15 as it works its way through the Legislature.

Charisse Millett

Executive Director

Shaun Kuzakin

PSEA President