

HCS SS SB 24 -- FIRST RESPONDERS

SPONSOR: Hough (Schwadron)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Crime Prevention and Public Safety by a vote of 23 to 0. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules- Legislative Oversight by a vote of 9 to 0.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for SB 24.

The bill creates new provisions relating to communications during peer support counseling programs for certain first responders. With certain exceptions, detailed in the bill, a communication made by a first responder or peer support advisor in a peer support counseling session, as well as any oral or written information conveyed in the peer support counseling session, will be confidential and will not be disclosed by any person participating in the peer support counseling session or released to any person or entity. Any communication relating to a peer support counseling session made confidential under this bill that is made between peer support advisors and the supervisors or staff of a peer support counseling program, or between the supervisor and staff of a peer support counseling program, will be confidential and will not be disclosed, except as otherwise specified in the bill.

An employer of a first responder that establishes a peer support counseling program shall develop a policy or rule that imposes disciplinary measures against a peer support advisor who violates the confidentiality of the peer support counseling program by sharing information learned in a peer support counseling session with personnel who are not supervisors or staff of the peer support counseling program, unless otherwise exempted under the provisions of this bill.

The bill specifies that no employer may mandate that any employee participate in a peer support counseling program.

Current law contains a voluntary cancer benefits pool established for the purpose of providing benefits for firefighters who have contracted cancer in connection with employment as a firefighter. This bill changes the name of the pool to a voluntary critical illness benefits pool and expands the pool to allow other first responders, specifically emergency medical technician-basic, emergency medical technician-paramedic, and telecommunicators, to have access to benefits through the pool for exposure to a diagnosable trauma stress event, or diagnosable cumulative post traumatic stress injury over the course of a career. A payment may

be made from the pool to a covered individual for the actual award, up to \$10,000, for seeking treatment with a licensed psychiatrist or a licensed psychologist and any subsequent courses of treatment recommended by such licensed individuals. If a covered individual returns to the same position of employment after a post traumatic stress injury diagnosis, the covered individual may receive benefits in this section for the continued treatment of such injury or any subsequently covered post traumatic stress injury diagnosis.

Current law allows for the State Fire Marshal to disburse grants to voluntary critical illness pools. This provision expires June 30, 2023. This bill repeals the expiration date.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the Senate perfected version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the Fire Dept and EMS and several others have reached out to people in the past few years; telecommunicators are the first first responders to handle a call and there is a lot of trauma associated with that.

Testifying in person for the bill were Senator Hough; Uli Gulje; Scott Guccione, Springfield Fire Dept.; Ambulance District Association of Missouri; Missouri Fraternal Order Of Police; Missouri 911 Directors Association; Missouri Chapter of the National Emergency Number Association; Missouri Chapter of the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials; Missouri Ambulance Association; Missouri Center for Public Health Excellence; Scott Frandsen, Missouri Assoc. of Fire Chiefs; and Gregory M. Brown, Missouri Fire Service Alliance.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.