



Patrick J. Connolly
Chief of Police

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Fellow Law Enforcement Officials of Central Illinois,

Historically, our profession pays minimal attention to the mental health needs of our officers. Intent on changing this, the Urbana Police Department wishes to join the national trend and offer trained peer support for its officers. Our research is clear that an effective peer support program must encompass a large cadre of officers, and we are inviting all interested police departments within ILEAS Region 7 to join us in this endeavor.

The suicide rate in law enforcement is 50% higher than the national average, and nearly 300 police officers end their own lives each year. With the growing recognition of PTSD, high divorce rates, increased addictions and countless other issues, it is clear there is a dramatic and immediate need for enhanced awareness and education.

To address officer mental health needs, IACP encourages the use of peer support and nationally peer support is accepted as a best practice, regardless of the demographic. We wish to create a Peer Support Network; a ready resource for members of the law enforcement family when and if there was a need for psychological support. This program is not intended to replace an agency's EAP, but to augment it and to offer a more personal, less formal alternative. In doing so, officers can speak face-to-face, one on one, with other officers about the stressors of their work or home lives, without the fear of unwanted disclosure.

This program will revolve around the training and availability of peer supporters; volunteers who will answer the call to respond to a brother or sister in need of support. These peer supporters will operate with the highest degree of confidentiality and integrity, offering not only their trained ears, but the ability to refer officers to more advanced resources should they be appropriate. They will be the "first responders, for first responders."

We hope that your agency will be willing to join us in building this needed support system for our officers and their families. If you are interested in participating in this program, would like to assist with its planning, or simply desire more information please contact one of the members of my staff heading up this project:

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We will convene a planning and information meeting in early 2016; please let us know if you, or a representative from your department, wish to attend.

Thanks for your time and consideration,

Chief Patrick Connolly