



RACHAEL A. CABRAL-GUEVARA

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 55TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Mental Health

Representative Rachael Cabral-Guevara

February 9th, 2022

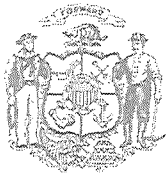
Thank you Chairman Tittl and committee members for allowing me to testify on Assembly bill 668, an essential bill to help promote the mental wellbeing of our law enforcement officers.

Over the course of the past few months, the state legislature has worked to afford law enforcement officers all pertinent and necessary resources to dutifully carry out the roles and responsibilities within their profession. This bill furthers those conversations by incorporating the consideration of their mental welfare.

AB668 requires that the Department of Justice, alongside the Department of Health Services and The Center for Suicide Awareness to institute a training program with the sole focus of reducing officer and First Responder suicides, as well as providing information that will direct concerned Responders to crisis intervention and other counseling programs. This piece of legislation will also direct DOJ to provide an annual grant of \$250,000 to the Center for Suicide Awareness, based on the established curriculum.

With 15 officers having committed suicide over the past 5 years, and the emotional toll being the highest in years, we must look to take genuine care of our officers who are committed to protecting our communities. The program specifically focuses on four key components: mental, physical, social and spiritual well-being. This program, since its conception by the FBI National Academy Associates and The Center for Suicide Awareness in March of 2021, over 10 officers have reached out for additional support; an important notion that goes to show that this type of support is greatly needed in this line of work, and the officers are now beginning to receive it.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify on this important piece of legislation, I hope you consider supporting Assembly bill 668. I would be happy to answer any questions you or any committee members may have.



ANDRÉ JACQUE

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*Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Mental Health
Senator André Jacque
February 9, 2022*

Chair Tittl and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 668, the Law Enforcement and First Responder Resiliency & Wellness Training Program.

In the last 5 years The State of Wisconsin has lost at least 15 Officers to suicide. Assembly Bill 668 requires the Department of Justice, in cooperation with the Department of Health Services and the Center for Suicide Awareness, to establish a training curriculum for the purposes of reducing Officer and First Responder Suicide and provide information concerning programs that offer crisis intervention and counseling services to law enforcement officers. The bill requires that the training curriculum be made available to law enforcement agencies to be used as part of ongoing officer training. The bill also provides that DOJ must provide a \$250,000 annual grant to the Center for Suicide Awareness to provide training to law enforcement officers based on the curriculum that is established.

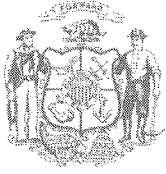
This program which is researched by the University of Pennsylvania has proven to reduce anxiety, stress, critical incidents, maladaptive behaviors, and suicides when implemented.

Since the FBI National Academy Associates and The Center for Suicide Awareness has conducted the training that started in March 2021, has had at least 15 Officers have come forward to ask for additional mental health support. Proving that the training is effective and that our Officers and First Responders need additional emotional and crisis support. This program provides that and saves money for counties and cities through retention and reform.

The Officer and First Responder Wellness Program focuses on these components:

- Mental – the ability to effectively cope with unique mental stressors and challenges.
- Physical – the ability to adopt and sustain healthy behaviors needed to enhance health and wellbeing.
- Social – the ability to engage in healthy social networks that promote overall wellbeing and optimal performance.
- Spiritual – the ability to strengthen a set of beliefs, principles, or values that sustain an individual's sense of wellbeing and purpose.

These components create a holistic resilience and wellness approach to maladaptive behaviors and increases self-awareness, self-regulation, and reduces suicide.



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Health Emergency Education Center, Medical College of Wisconsin, Menasha Police Dept, Winnebago County Law Enforcement Peer Support, Theda Care - Security and Officers, Appleton Police Department, Grand Chute Police Department, Brown County and Dane County, Badgers Sheriffs Association, and the Middleton Police Department.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 668.



Wisconsin State Lodge *Fraternal Order of Police*



PO Box 206 West Bend, WI 53095

Ryan Windorff
President

Shane Wrucke
Secretary

February 9, 2022

Wisconsin Fraternal Order of Police Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 668

Assembly Committee on Mental Health

Thank you, Representative Tittl and fellow committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Assembly Bill 668. My name is Brian Murphy, and I am here representing the Wisconsin Fraternal Order of Police.

Law enforcement is an incredibly difficult and dangerous profession and today officers are under more stress than ever before. High exposure to repeated stress and trauma leaves officers at a higher risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, and addiction. Numerous studies indicate that law enforcement officers have a higher rate of suicide than many other professions. We know that many officers are dealing with the emotional and physical impacts of their duties, but the actual rates of suicide are difficult to determine as there is no centralized repository of this data.

Since January 2016, the nonprofit organization Blue H.E.L.P. has been compiling a list of first responders lost to suicide. These numbers are the best data we have but are compiled from publicly available information, so they are not a true representation of the problem. According to Blue H.E.L.P. 768 law enforcement officers have died by suicide since 2016, including 17 right here in Wisconsin. Officers are the most valuable resource law enforcement agencies have and we need to make every effort to ensure that they stay healthy both physically and mentally.

Assembly Bill 668 would establish a training curriculum designed to prevent suicide in the law enforcement profession. There is currently no standardized training for officers to identify the causes, behaviors, warning signs, or risk factors associated with law enforcement suicide. This training would further identify intervention strategies to efficiently prevent suicide including crisis intervention and counseling services available to officers. This type of training has been used effectively and shown positive results in first responders across the country and is even taught in the United States military.

Assembly Bill 668 would also require the Department of Justice to collect data on officer suicides in Wisconsin so we can better understand the true scope of the problem and tailor our response in the most effective way possible.

There are a number of other bills in this body that have highlighted the tipping point of the law enforcement profession in Wisconsin. We are seeing record numbers of officers retiring at the first opportunity they can, officers resigning prior to retirement to enter the private sector, and the lowest number of new officers entering the profession in a decade. As part of the effort to recruit and retain officers, we need to focus on their mental and



Wisconsin State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police



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President

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emotional wellbeing. This legislation will save lives and show that Wisconsin values their law enforcement officers and is willing to make an investment in them.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Assembly Committee on Internal Affairs

Thank you Representative Felt and fellow committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Assembly Bill 602. My name is Ryan Windorff, and I am here representing the Wisconsin Fraternal Order of Police.

Law enforcement is an incredibly difficult and demanding profession and today officers are under more stress than ever before. High exposure to repeated stress and trauma leaves officers at a higher risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, and addiction. Wisconsin studies indicate that law enforcement officers have a higher rate of suicide than many other professions. We know that many officers are dealing with the emotional and physical impacts of their duties, but the mental costs of police are difficult to determine as there is no centralized repository of the data.

Since January 2018, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) has been compiling a list of law enforcement suicides. These numbers are the best that we have for our compiled from publicly available information. To date, we are not a true representation of the problem. According to the N.C.L.P. 108 law enforcement officer suicide law by suicide since 2016, including 17 right here in Wisconsin. Officers are the most valuable resource law enforcement agencies have and we need to make every effort to ensure that they stay healthy both physically and mentally.

Assembly Bill 602 would establish a training curriculum designed to prevent suicide in the law enforcement profession. This is currently an unmet need for officers to identify the stress, behavior, warning signs, or risk factors associated with law enforcement suicide. The training would further identify intervention strategies to efficiently prevent suicide including crisis intervention and counseling services available to officers. This type of training has been used effectively and has positive results in that it supports mental health and it can help in the long-term recovery.

Assembly Bill 602 would also require the Department of Justice to collect data on officer suicides in Wisconsin so we can better understand the true scope of the problem and tailor our response in the most effective way possible.

There are a number of other bills in this body that have highlighted the rising cost of the law enforcement profession in Wisconsin. We are seeing record numbers of officers retiring at the first opportunity they can, officers resigning prior to retirement to enter the private sector, and the fastest number of new officers entering the profession in a decade. As part of the effort to recruit and retain officers, we need to focus on their mental and

Public Comment on AB 668 Relating to: Law enforcement officer suicide prevention and reporting and making an appropriation

To Chairman Tittl, Vice-Chair Cabral-Guevara, and the members of the Committee on Mental Health,

Thank you for holding this public hearing regarding a topic that is special to me and many of my family and friends. I would like to start by saying that this bill has great merit and is an excellent step towards addressing a grave concern in the law enforcement community. As a 16-year law enforcement veteran in the Milwaukee area, I can speak about the mental health challenges facing police officers. As a 21-year veteran of the Wisconsin National Guard, I also have experienced the demands a military career places on the service member, their family, and their civilian employers. With that, I would like to request that you support the premise of this bill but also consider a few changes that would strengthen the effectiveness of this bill and ensure successful outcomes for officers, their families, the organizations that support and employ them, and the communities they serve.

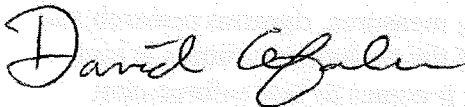
The bill's intent appears to be the development of a training curriculum aimed at the prevention of officer suicide through information dissemination. This training would include the "causes, behaviors, warning signs, and risk factors associated with officer suicide" and identify intervention strategies. As a National Institute of Justice LEADS (Law Enforcement Advancing Data and Science) Scholar focused on evidence-based policing measures, rigorous research and evaluation of practices are imperative. The main component of the evaluation process is high-fidelity data coupled with sound research methodology. When it comes to law enforcement suicides, the lack of data has shown to be a national issue. Recently, Public Law 116-143 was passed by the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives concerning Law Enforcement Suicide Data Collection (LESDC). This law creates a national program within the Federal Bureau of Investigation to track law enforcement suicides on a national level. Reporting to the FBI is voluntary. It also includes capturing additional occupational categories of employees such as criminal investigator, corrections officer, line of duty officer, and 911 dispatcher. The program also collects information concerning suicides and suicide attempts, information preceding the incident, and the method used in the incident. The law provides confidentiality for individuals by not including personally identifiable information in reports. While the federal government has started to recently see the need to collect information surrounding law enforcement suicide, non-profit organizations centered on mental health have already gathered valuable information.

Blue H.E.L.P. (Honor, Educate, Lead, Prevent) is a non-profit organization that has compiled data related to law enforcement suicides in the United States since 2016. Of the 769 law enforcement suicides recorded to date, nearly 33% of those are military veterans. This is a shocking statistic, given that military veterans only account for 20% of all law enforcement officers across the nation. **This means that veterans within law enforcement are committing suicide at a rate of 74% higher than their non-military veteran peers.** Suicide in law enforcement is occurring at an alarming rate. When looking at veteran suicide within law enforcement, one can see an even more problematic situation. The promising news is that the legislature has already identified a need to address veterans' programs (2021 Assembly Bill 753).

The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs already has established a Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP), which provides mental health services to veterans.

I would ask that evidence-based measures specifically be utilized in the language of this bill, to include recommending only intervention strategies shown to be effective interventions through evidence-based research. Also, consider aligning the data collection with the information obtained from the LESDC program to ensure it is comparable and generalizable with data across the nation. This will help strengthen any local findings while allowing for a first-time national-level analysis. Additionally, incentivize partnerships between law enforcement agencies and academic institutions for rigorous research and evidence-based results. This is vital to the effective, efficient, and sustainable outcomes we all desire. The American Society for Evidence-Based Policing (ASEBP) is one organization that is an industry leader in this domain. Lastly, address the need to fully comprehend and evaluate the unique challenges veterans face within law enforcement and bolster established programs like VORP by supporting current legislation. I am grateful for your consideration in understanding and preventing suicides within law enforcement.

Very Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Cefalu". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

David Cefalu

Subject: Suicides by officers employed by WI Criminal Justice agencies 2021 ASSEMBLY BILL 668

Mr Hall and Ms Barbiyeru

I wish to submit this as written testimony about **2021 ASSEMBLY BILL 668** to be made available to all of the Mental Health Committee members. Thank you for facilitating this

Nancy Slattery
9704 Pautz Road
Maribel WI 54227

Members of the Mental Health Committee
February 9 2022

I wish to submit written testimony to the Mental Health Committee on the occasion of this hearing on Assembly bill 668 which is a match to SB
I find this is a serious issue and welcome the action to give law enforcement officers the tools personally to "prevent suicide" in themselves. This is long overdue and I want this aspect to receive full funding.

I think there is also a more systemic issue than this that needs your attention thoughly when this discussion is completed. The range of responsibilities of today's law enforcement officers is so much broader than it has been in the past. Yes, many police officers have delivered babies and gone above and beyond in the past. But today with the absence of any real parity in our health system treating mental health with the same thoroughness as cancer or heart disease, we have many needs out on the street that are not as clear cut as a mother's water breaking prior to a birth.

It is so necessary to have the training to be aware of what one is unable to know by a glance. Some states and cities have begun the "crisis teams" that respond when the calls warrant it. Please investigate and fund it as this also so that the plates of the law enforcement officers are not filled with tasks and responsibilities that are beyond their experience and the pay level. The "prayer and hope" level of the funding levels of our most local taxing groups can not achieve what is really necessary with the limited trainings and overwork the officers are impacted by.

Depression, as you probably know, often occurs, when an individual attempts or is given a responsibility for a role that is beyond their training and because of that, carries the guilt of "why did I not succeed". I know that personally and do not think I am any different from my fellow humans who are correction or police officers. Give them a full tool box or you leave them hanging on a cliff where they see no hope for any different results. And as a result blame themselves.

Thank you for reading.

2021 - 2022 LEGISLATURE

2021 ASSEMBLY BILL 668

October 29, 2021 - Introduced by Representatives Cabral-Guevara, Rozar,