



January 25, 2023

Members of the Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, we are writing in support of HF 506 for first responders to receive equine therapy. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that first responders experience higher rates of mental illnesses and suicidal ideation compared to other professions and the general public.¹ Though it hardly takes research to recognize that first responders encounter incredibly stressful and often traumatic situations every day.

We are glad to see HF 506 as one of many recent efforts to break down barriers in jobs where asking for help has not always been easy. Equine-assisted therapy has shown promising results in several studies, particularly for people with trauma. One study stated "EAT-PTSD (equine-assisted therapy) may engage individuals resistant to more formal treatment modalities and encourage subsequent openness to additional therapy."² In addition to noted short-term benefits of relieving symptoms another study found "stronger motivation to stay in psychotherapy and increase of resilience was associated with EAP (equine-assisted psychotherapy)."³

Best practices from Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) in the U.S. Department of Justice show that first responders, particularly law enforcement, benefit from care that is tailored to their experience on the job.⁴ Officers are more likely to seek care when they are confident that their privacy is safe – the program that would be funded by this grant provides exactly that. The funding also decreases barriers some may have in affording the care that they need. For these reasons, we urge you to pass HF 506.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director

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¹ Disaster Technical Assistance Center Supplemental Research Bulletin First Responders: Behavioral Health Concerns, Emergency Response, and Trauma, May 2018.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/dtac/supplementalresearchbulletin-firstresponders-may2018.pdf>

² Arnon S, Fisher PW, Pickover A, Lowell A, Turner JB, Hilburn A, Jacob-McVey J, Malajian BE, Farber DG, Hamilton JF, Hamilton A, Markowitz JC, Neria Y. Equine-Assisted Therapy for Veterans with PTSD: Manual Development and Preliminary Findings. *Mil Med.* 2020 Jun 8;185(5-6):e557-e564. doi: 10.1093/milmed/usz444. PMID: 32034416; PMCID: PMC7282489.

³ Kovács G, van Dijke A, Enders-Slegers MJ. Psychodynamic Based Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy in Adults with Intertwined Personality Problems and Traumatization: A Systematic Review. *Int J Environ Res Public Health.* 2020 Aug 5;17(16):5661. doi: 10.3390/ijerph17165661. PMID: 32764468; PMCID: PMC7460234.

⁴ Preparing for the Unimaginable: How Chiefs Can Safeguard Officer Mental Health Before and After Mass Casualty Events, May 2016. <https://cops.usdoj.gov/ric/Publications/cops-p347-pub.pdf>

