



February 9, 2021

Dear Members of the Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy Committee:

NAMI Minnesota is writing to express its support for HF 377. Ensuring access to psychotherapy from mental health professionals is very important for the wellbeing of Minnesota firefighters.

First responders have higher rates of depression due to repeated exposure to traumatic events. They are not just responding to fires, but to accidents, emergencies and other events. Firefighters can experience secondary trauma from what they have seen, resulting in poor sleep, increased alcohol use, avoidance behaviors and PTSD. It's been found that between 7-37% of firefighters have been diagnosed with PTSD. For firefighters, PTSD places them at higher risk for suicide and they experience suicidal thoughts at a higher rate than the general population. A 2018 study found that more firefighters died by suicide in 2017 than all line-of-duty deaths.

A report put out by SAMHSA stated that "The nature of the work of firefighters, including repeated exposure to painful and provocative experiences and erratic sleep schedules, can pose significant risk to firefighters' mental health (Stanley, Boffa, Hom, Kimbrel, & Joiner, 2017). To add to that risk, firefighters face many barriers to seeking help, including stigma and the cost of treatment. For instance, according to a study by Stanley et al., volunteer firefighters have greater structural barriers to use of mental health services (including cost, inadequate transportation, difficulty getting time off from work, and availability of resources) than career firefighters and the general population (2017)."

HF 377 would provide access to five or more sessions with a mental health professional. Providing an option outside of one's health insurance provides assurance of anonymity and eliminates barriers related to copayments and deductibles. We want our firefighters to receive the help and support they need to maintain their resiliency when confronted with horrible and tragic situations. This is one important step that we hope you will take today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue Abderholden".

Sue Abderholden, MPH  
Executive Director



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