

State of Arkansas
95th General Assembly
Regular Session, 2025

A Bill

HOUSE BILL 1998

By: Representative Torres
By: Senator Dees

Filed with: House Committee on Public Health, Welfare, and Labor
pursuant to A.C.A. §10-3-217.

For An Act To Be Entitled

AN ACT TO CREATE THE JAMES MCFERRON MENTAL HEALTH,
WELLNESS, AND RESILIENCY ACT; TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO
SERVICES AND TRAINING TO FIRST RESPONDERS; TO PROVIDE
AND PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH, LEADERSHIP, WELLNESS, AND
RESILIENCY PROGRAMS FOR FIRST RESPONDERS ACROSS THE
STATE; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Subtitle

TO CREATE THE JAMES MCFERRON MENTAL
HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND RESILIENCY ACT;
AND TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO SERVICES AND
TRAINING TO FIRST RESPONDERS.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

SECTION 1. Arkansas Code Title 12, Chapter 1, is amended to add an
additional subchapter to read as follows:

Subchapter 2 – James McFerron Mental Health, Wellness, and Resiliency Act

12-1-201. Title.

This subchapter shall be known and may be cited as the "James McFerron
Mental Health, Wellness, and Resiliency Act".

12-1-202. Legislative findings and intent.

1 (a) The General Assembly finds that:

2 (1) Mental health conditions affect a significant portion of
3 first responders across the state and have long-term impacts on first
4 responders, their families, and the communities they serve;

5 (2) Increased training for peer-to-peer support and access to
6 mental health, leadership, wellness, and resiliency programs and services
7 lead to better mental and physical wellness in our first responders across
8 the state;

9 (3) Mental health, leadership, wellness, and resiliency training
10 and education programs improve a first responder's ability to cope with
11 stress, both on and off duty, trauma, and adversity; and

12 (4) A coordinated effort is needed to address first responder
13 mental health, leadership, wellness, and resiliency disparities amongst
14 state, county, and local agencies and to promote mental health, leadership,
15 wellness, and resiliency.

16 (b) The General Assembly intends this act to provide for mental
17 health, leadership, wellness, and resiliency training programs, services, and
18 resources to be accessible to all first responders across the state,
19 promoting holistic wellness.

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21 12-1-203. Definitions.

22 As used in this subchapter:

23 (1) "Certified peer support member" means a first responder, a
24 retired first responder, or a chaplain who has received training in providing
25 peer-to-peer support and been certified by the Department of Public Safety to
26 provide peer-to-peer support to other first responders;

27 (2) "Chaplain" means a member of the clergy;

28 (3) "First responder" means a person with specialized training
29 who is among the first to arrive and provide assistance or incident
30 resolution at the scene of an emergency, including without limitation a
31 certified law enforcement officer, a firefighter, an emergency medical
32 services provider, a public safety or emergency medical dispatcher, and an
33 employee of a correctional facility; and

34 (4) "Peer-to-peer support" includes without limitation
35 trainings, programs, resources, and emotional and moral support in subjects
36 including without limitation mental health, leadership, wellness, resiliency,

and critical incident stress management.

12-1-204. Expansion of mental health services.

The Department of Public Safety shall develop and provide to first responders in every region of the state:

(1) Training to become a certified peer support member; and

(2) Programs and resources on subjects including without limitation mental health, leadership, wellness, resiliency, and critical incident stress management.

12-1-205. Peer-to-peer support network.

(a) The Department of Public Safety shall:

(1) Establish a peer-to-peer support network consisting of volunteers who are certified peer support members;

(2) Designate an employee of the department to serve as the coordinator for the peer-to-peer support network; and

(3) Work to ensure that members of the peer-to-peer support network are located throughout the state.

(b) The department shall coordinate with the members of the peer-to-peer network to:

(1) Provide peer-to-peer support to a requesting agency that employs a first responder; and

(2) Ensure that peer-to-peer support is accessible to a first responder in the state, regardless of location.

12-1-206. Reporting.

The Department of Public Safety shall provide an annual report to the Governor and Legislative Council summarizing the department's activities under this subchapter.

Referred requested by the Arkansas House of Representatives

Prepared by: CEB/AMS