

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

Anne M. Gobi
STATE SENATOR

Worcester, Hampden,
Hampshire & Middlesex
Tel. (617) 722-1540
Fax (617) 722-1078
E-Mail: Anne.Gobi@masenate.gov

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Friday, July 27, 2018

CONTACT: Derek Silver
PHONE: 617-722-1540

MA Senate Passes Bill to Improve Mental Health Services for First Responders

BOSTON – Today, **Senator Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer)** and the Massachusetts State Senate took action to ensure confidentiality for first responders when participating in peer support services following critical incidents.

"Anything that can be done to assist those who assist us is a worthwhile endeavor," commented Senator Gobi. "Confidentiality is a basic need for those men and women who have witnessed and endured events that others never have to face."

Responding to a critical incident can have a significant effect on the mental health of the Commonwealth's firefighters, paramedics, and law enforcement officers. In order to ensure prompt access to the necessary services, many departments rely on trained peer support counselors. These counselors can direct the affected first responders to the necessary mental health support services, or offer their own support as needed.

However, the lack of confidentiality afforded these peer support counselors has complicated their roles, and dissuaded some first responders from using this service. The sensitive nature of mental health issues is further compounded by concerns that first responders will experience professional adversity due to their decision to seek mental help.

"Police officers, firefighters, and paramedics work under trying circumstances in the best of times, and these critical incidents can greatly increase the dangers associated with mental health" said **Michael O. Moore (D-Millbury)**. "These sensible confidentiality protections will allow our firefighters, paramedics and law enforcement officers to seek the help they need without fear of stigmatization.

“First responders—the men and women who keep us safe in the most trying of circumstances—work under high levels of stress, and often are left to fend for themselves when it comes to personal mental health care” said **Senate President Karen E. Spilka (D-Ashland)**. “This bill grants those first responders the access they deserve to confidential support, and allows them to seek help without fear of retribution or stigma.”

The legislation passed by the Senate provides that a critical incident stress management team member shall not be required to testify or divulge any information obtained during the receipt of critical incident stress or crisis intervention services. The language does provide for limited exemptions, including when a person is in danger of serious bodily harm or death, or if the information indicates the existence of a crime.

“Our first responders deal with situations involving extremely difficult elements such as loss of life, serious bodily injury and direct threats to their own personal safety and that of others. They need and deserve the opportunity for counseling and peer support from colleagues that share a common bond and common perspective on the challenges they face,” said **Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr (R- Gloucester)**. “This bill will create that opportunity, without fear of harm to the confidentiality that is critical to these conversations.”

The legislation, which passed the Senate unanimously, has now been referred to the House of Representatives for consideration. To continue tracking the bill, S.2633, please visit the Legislature’s website, www.malegislature.gov.

###