



## Public Safety Officer Support Act of 2020

***Congressman David Trone (D-MD) and Congressman Guy Reschenthaler (R-PA)***

### **Background**

Public safety officers – firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical technicians – work to maintain the safety, health, and wellbeing of the communities they serve. Often, this requires responding to stressful and potentially traumatic situations. This work not only puts individuals at risk for experiencing serious injury or harm, but it places them at up to 25.6 times higher risk for developing post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) when compared to individuals without such experiences<sup>1</sup>. Despite this, public safety officers often do not have adequate access to resources or support, which leaves them more vulnerable to suicide.<sup>2</sup>

**Current practices support the need for a change.** The Public Safety Officer Benefit (PSOB) program provides disability relief to families of officers who have died or to officers who have been permanently disabled in the line of duty. In 2017, the United States Department of Justice approved 481 PSOB claims, but not a single one for the over 240 public safety officers who died as a result of suicide<sup>3</sup>.

Despite being more likely to die by suicide than in the line of duty, officers who have died or are permanently disabled by either suicide or post traumatic stress disorder do not qualify for the PSOB program.

### **About the Legislation**

The Public Safety Officer Support Act of 2020:

- Recognizes PTSD as a condition that can be as debilitating as physical injuries that prevent officers from performing their job.
- Creates an avenue for officers to seek disability benefits for PTSD linked to severe trauma, which can result in serious and sometimes deadly mental health consequences, such as suicide.

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<sup>1</sup> Samantha K. Brooks, Rebecca Dunn, Clara A. M. Sage, Richard Amlôt, Neil Greenberg & G. James Rubin (2015) Risk and resilience factors affecting the psychological wellbeing of individuals deployed in humanitarian relief roles after a disaster, *Journal of Mental Health*, 24:6, 385-413, DOI: 10.3109/09638237.2015.1057334

<sup>2</sup> Ian H. Stanley, Melanie A. Hom, Thomas E. Joiner (2016). A systematic review of suicidal thoughts and behaviors among police officers, firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics, *Clinical Psychology Review*, 44, 25-44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2015.12.002>.

<sup>3</sup> Ruderman White Paper on Mental Health and Suicide of First Responders. [https://rudermanfoundation.org/white\\_papers/police-officers-and-firefighters-are-more-likely-to-die-by-suicide-than-in-line-of-duty/](https://rudermanfoundation.org/white_papers/police-officers-and-firefighters-are-more-likely-to-die-by-suicide-than-in-line-of-duty/)



- Expands the Public Safety Officer Benefit program by allowing for officers lost as a result of suicide or disabled by PTSD or attempted suicide to apply for benefits.

The trauma that our public safety officers witness and experience can have a significant impact on their mental health. Officers' ability to properly carry out their duties is dependent on sound physical and mental health. The time has come to provide public safety officers with equal mental and physical health benefits.

**Support for the Public Safety Officer Support Act**

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