



Sheriff's Department



Robert Roed
Sheriff

March 7th, 2023

Chairman Nathe and members of the committee,

For the record my name is Jason Kraft and I am testifying in support of Senate bill 2003, specifically to section 9, the law enforcement resiliency grant program. Currently I am a Captain at the Ward County Sheriff's Department in Minot. I am also a combat veteran of the Army's 101st Airborne division and was in the initial ground invasion of Iraq in 2003. I spent my 19th birthday in a gunner's turret on the way to Baghdad. I have firsthand experience in telling you, that many of the effects on a person's wellbeing, from being a soldier and an officer, are similar in many ways. Yet the services provided to each are vastly different.

We expect both our soldiers, and our officers, to be tough and fearless. We also expect them to be compassionate and consoling. Sometimes expecting them to shift between the two almost instantaneously. They accomplish this because we learn how to turn our emotions off in this profession. It's a survival skill, but it's also a skill that saves lives and rescues victims. Don't think about what you're doing, just do it. But where do these officers go when it's time to think again. Who do they turn to? All too often I'll tell you they're left alone. The complexity of the emotional burden that we expect our officers to bear is not easily understood.

Immediately when we think of officer stress we think of deaths, suicides, homicides, or traffic accidents, but there are many cases of life or death faced by our officers that we don't hear about. Many of the officers in our own department have faced multiple life threatening situations. They've wrestled with suspects that are actively trying to take their gun out of their holster, pried a loaded revolver out of the hands of a suicidal person, and fought off a suspect long enough for back up to arrive while the suspect is telling the officer to look them in the eye because they want them to be the last person they see before they kill them. As an administrator, that supervises three sworn divisions within the department, it is these calls that concern me the most.

Since joining the core team of agencies to support officer wellness in March of 2022, our department has made substantial progress in supporting our officers. A little over a week ago, a deputy of our department discharged his firearm at a suspect that almost ran him over. In that same incident, another deputies patrol vehicle was intentionally hit head on by the same offender.

Due to the training and collaboration with the core team over the last year, our department had deputies trained in peer support that were in our office talking to those officers shortly after the incident. Supporting them and checking in with them. Not many agencies are where we're at, but with this appropriation, we hope that there can always be someone there for that lone officer in a small agency. This appropriation leaves no one behind. It provides them support regardless of their city or counties health plan, their employee assistance plan, and access to services in rural areas.



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So what is the cost of one officers emotional well-being? That's a tough question to answer, but ironically this is an appropriation of \$400,000, which is the same cost to the federal government in life insurance benefits for one service member in the armed forces.

Recently, a respected law enforcement officer in the Minot community tragically took their own life. The grief and acknowledgement of this Officers death in the community was overwhelmingly apparent. I drove in the procession, and I witnessed the streets lined in places with people standing outside their cars, some saluting, some with their hand over their heart and others solemn. You'd be hard pressed to find one person that day that wouldn't support this appropriation.

Society today understands what it is that we go through. It's difficult to count how many times I've been randomly thanked by complete strangers over the years for what it is I do. Never once in that same regard has someone randomly told me I'm overpaid, over appreciated, or have too many benefits. If this bill can affect the outcome of one officer's life, only one, it's worth it.

Thank you and with that I can answer any questions if you have any.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason Kraft".

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