

Testimony in support of SB 2213

Senate Judiciary Committee

Emily Schwartz

January 23, 2023

Chairman Larson and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Emily Schwartz and act as the Director as the North Dakota Human Trafficking Task Force, but come to you today outside of that capacity, as a partner to law enforcement agencies that provide critical services to victims of crime across the state, and whom I seek to support.

In late 2020, a group of law enforcement agencies recognized the need to better support their staff and each other's agencies, due to sustained secondary trauma on the job and to provide peer support during critical incidents. There is a significant amount of data to support the need for services as law enforcement experience sustained exposure to fatalities, child maltreatment, suicides, sexual assaults, and domestic violence, resulting in substance abuse, increased rates of suicide, marital distress, depression and anxiety, and decreased physical wellness.

A federal grant was hosted by Cass County Sheriff's Office, in collaboration with the West Fargo Police Department, Ward County Sheriff's Office, Williston Police Department, and the North Dakota Human Trafficking Task Force. This core team launched programming to promote internal practices to support officers, train administrators on policy and procedures to address secondary trauma, provide peer-to-peer training for units responding to critical incidents, and promote and provide access to specialized therapists across the state through the Resiliency.Support.Therapy (RST) program developed in collaboration with the Dakota Children's Advocacy Center (DCAC). The trauma-informed therapists DCAC contracts to

provide these services are vetted for their unique experience in therapeutic modalities to support specialized needs related to secondary trauma.

Since the RST program was promoted to law enforcement agencies in late 2020, forty-four officers have accessed services. The top presenting concerns are vicarious trauma, PTSD, and compassion fatigue. Law enforcement is now the leading discipline in accessing services through this program. The average number of sessions accessed per individual is eight sessions. This is a good indicator that staff accessing services are finding value in the therapy and continuing with sessions, as opposed to meeting just once. Please find data included below in this testimony that outlines the usage of RST programming by discipline, presenting problem, in-person vs. telehealth access, and intervention to support the client. In my opinion, one of the reasons the program has been so successful is because it is led and informed by agencies who are working in the field every day and understand the need, allowing solutions to be geared towards this unique demographic for specialized programming that is very much needed in the state.

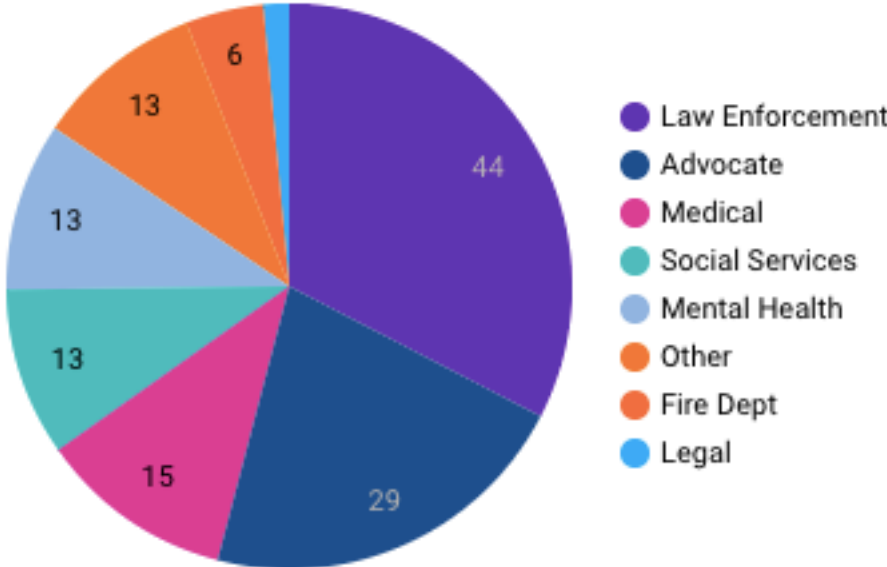
Today, you will hear testimony from law enforcement core team partners that speaks to the need for ongoing programming to be expanded statewide. The impact of the work of this team has made a significant difference in development of critical supports to law enforcement across the state and we seek for that work to continue. There are 127 individual law enforcement agencies throughout the state that are comprised of city, county, and state jurisdictions. There are approximately 2190 licensed peace officers currently working for these agencies. In addition, there are about 300 individuals who maintain their license but do not actively work for a law enforcement agency. Correctional officers are not captured in these figures and it is imperative that they also receive support through this programming. The State's financial support is

absolutely critical in continuing to build a coordinated, effective response for law enforcement officers experiencing the impact of secondary trauma in their work.

Many of us here are afforded the opportunity to live our lives knowing that help is a phone call away when we need it the most. I ask you what are we doing to support those on the other end of that call, the people who support us every day, at any hour, in any circumstance, putting their lives on the line at significant cost to their own. Is it not our obligation to honor their experience and be there for them in return? I therefore ask that you recommend a 'do pass' on SB 2213 and am happy to answer any questions you may have.

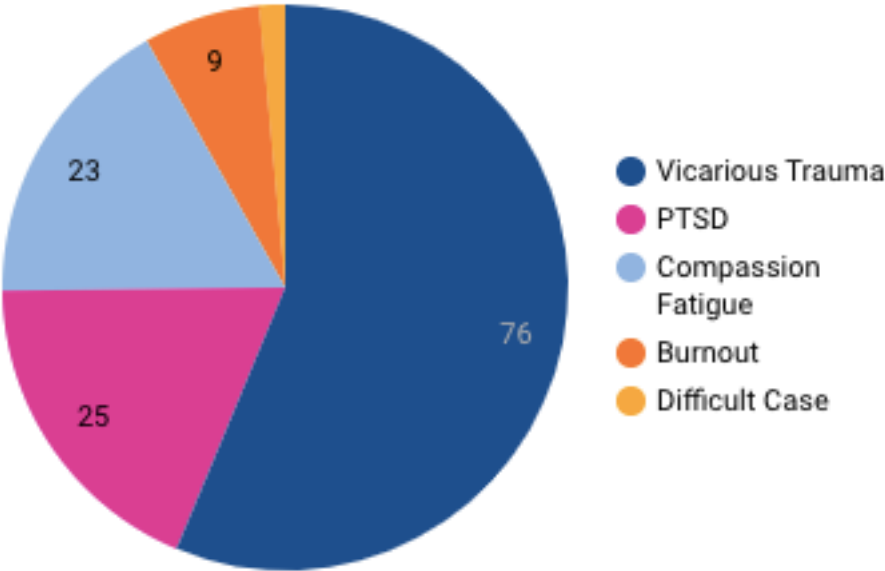
RST Usage by Discipline as of January 23, 2023

Discipline



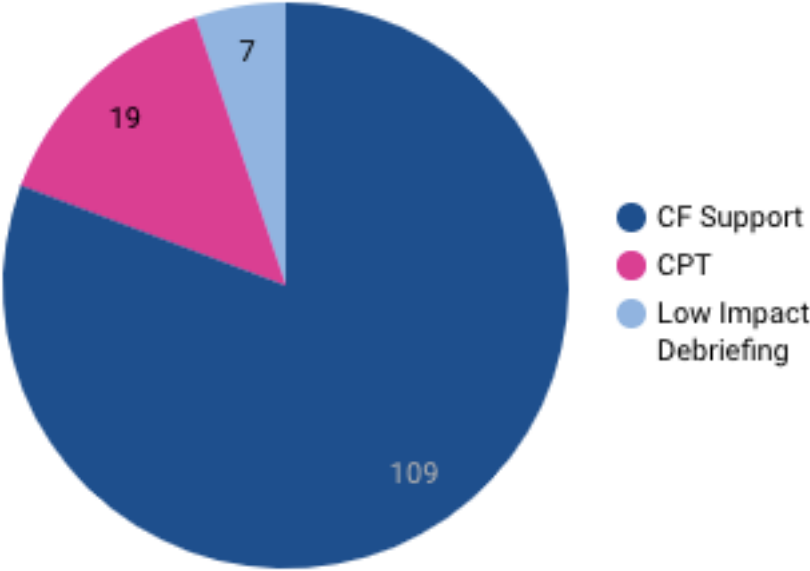
Presenting Problem for RST Therapeutic Services as of January 23, 2023

Presenting Problem



Type of intervention offered for Therapeutic Support as of January 23, 2023

Type of Intervention



In person vs. Telehealth Usage of RST Program as of January 23, 2023

In-Person vs. Telehealth

