

Stricken language would be deleted from and underlined language would be added to present law.

State of Arkansas  
95th General Assembly  
Regular Session, 2025

# A Bill

HOUSE BILL 1998

By: Representative Torres

By: Senator Dees

## 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.

(a) The General Assembly finds that:

(1) Mental health conditions affect a significant portion of first responders across the state and have long-term impacts on first



responders, their families, and the communities they serve;

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

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

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

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

#### 12-1-203. Definitions.

As used in this subchapter:

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

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

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

(4) "Peer-to-peer support" includes without limitation trainings, programs, resources, and emotional and moral support in subjects 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.