



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

2139 Silas Deane Highway
Suite 205
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
(860) 257-8066

Shannon Perkins, LMSW, President
Stephen Wanczyk- Karp, LMSW, Executive Director
info.naswct@socialworkers.org

Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force
Testimony on Utilization of Social Workers by Police Departments for Officer Well-Being and Mental Health Examinations

November 2, 2020

*Christina Cowan & Yllka Sakaj, Interns, National Association of Social Workers,
Connecticut Chapter*

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, CT chapter we offer this additional testimony on utilization of social workers by Connecticut Police Departments. Prior testimony has been submitted on utilization of social workers for 911 calls.

NASW/CT sees the need to add licensed clinical social workers (LCSW) to the list of providers who are eligible to perform mental health assessments of police officers (Section 16 of the Police Accountability Bill). We recommend that the Task Force include this in the final recommendations. Furthermore, and most importantly, NASW/CT sees the need to address officer well-being, which social workers can help facilitate.

Firstly, the bill states in Section 16, that the behavioral health assessments must be conducted by a board-certified psychiatrist or psychologist who has experience in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This examination needs to be conducted every 5 years for each police officer in CT. Provided below are statistics for CT:

- At the end of 2019, there were only 2,087 psychologists and approximately 900 psychiatrists in CT.
- At the end of 2019, there were 7,116 licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs) in CT that can be utilized by police departments.
- In 2016 there were 6,628 officers in CT.

The number of professionals who have experience in PTSD and the number that would be willing to conduct these assessments creates an issue of limited professionals. However, LCSWs are often experienced in both diagnosing and treating PTSD. We propose that LCSWs should also be included with psychologists and psychiatrists in the assessment of behavioral health for officers. This will allow police departments to have a larger pool of professionals to contract with, and at a cost-effective rate.

Secondly, police officers deal with stressful situations constantly. High levels of stress at work can affect their personal life and vice versa. Thus, let's start with a simple concept that makes sense. "Help yourself first before assisting others." This not only applies to the physical well-being but also, mental well-being. Helping yourself however, is for

most people, more difficult than helping others first. Therefore, social workers can be a great asset to proactively guide and examine officer wellness to assist them in “helping themselves first.” We have provided some concerning facts for mental health in police departments:

- Researchers estimate that 10% - 17% of police officers in the United States demonstrate symptoms of PTSD.
- Most officers identify interpersonal or organizational conflict as the most significant source of stress.
- Depression and alcohol abuse are major consequences of work-related stress.
- A tragic outcome of the various mental stressors on police officers is officer suicide. Officer deaths by suicide occur 2.4 times more frequently than deaths by homicide. Approximately 25% of officers experience suicidal ideations, compared to 13.5% of the general population.

To deal with these alarming issues, various officer wellness programs are in place throughout the country. “Building and Sustaining an Officer Wellness Program Lessons from the San Diego Police Department” (2018) is a report that provides guidance to agencies across the United States that are looking to implement wellness programs or to improve upon existing initiatives.

Highly respected professionals such as psychologist, therapist, psychiatrists, physicians, nutritionists, etc. offer services to police officers and collaborate with police departments. Most of the interventions from these professionals however, are reactive. To address these issues, the NASW/CT presents the following on how social workers within a police department has the ability to be proactive, effective, and increase work performance:

- Social workers will establish and build genuine and trustworthy relationships to ensure positive work environments. Most people are reluctant to seek help. However, having someone in the department with whom officers already feel comfortable with will make the approach much easier.
- Social workers have a broader view of human development and human needs. They will approach officers from a person-in-environment perspective, are culturally sensitive, inclusive, and can help others expand on these skills.
- Social workers recognize and value the importance of healthy individuals and families. They are capable of facilitating individual therapy sessions for officers, and if need be, their family.
- Social workers are hands-on practitioners and facilitators with creative ideas. They are not afraid to put their pen and paper down and roll up their sleeves to do something concrete.
- Social workers have the ability to find allies and to collaborate with other agencies such as Officer Wellness Committee of the Connecticut Police Chief’s Association.
- Social workers can offer updated resources and research-based programs. Officers can constantly count on relatable and reliable information that serve their needs. Social workers reexamine and measure program effectiveness on a regular basis. They simultaneously reassess officer needs in order to improve their service.

Police officers and social workers are professionals who serve and protect people every day. Combining these two service-oriented professions is a recipe for great results.

It is imperative that the well-being of police officers and the availability of resources for behavioral health assessments be available to police departments that include licensed clinical social workers. NASW/CT urges the Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force to recommend utilization of Licensed Clinical Social Workers in police departments to facilitate officer wellness. We want to offer our services and intensive training to help all police departments, which in turn will benefit the community at-large.

References

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2016/rpt/2016-R-0275.htm>
https://www.e-psychiatry.com/pro/telepsychiatry_connecticut.php
<https://www.policeforum.org/assets/SanDiegoOSW.pdf>
<https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Practitioner-Licensing--Investigations/PLIS/Licensing-Statistics>