

RESOLUTION NO.

WHEREAS, the medical and physical fitness of first responders has traditionally been prioritized above the emotional and behavioral health of first responders; and

WHEREAS, there is growing concern regarding mental health issues and the significant impact they have on the overall wellness of first responders, their families, and the individual citizens of the City of Austin; and

WHEREAS, a May 2018 report by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration on first responder mental health concluded that first responders are at great danger of being exposed to potentially traumatic situations that pose risk of harm to them or the people under their care, which constitutes a great risk for the mental health of first responders, putting them at risk for stress, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance use, and suicide ideation and attempts; and

WHEREAS, the 85th Texas Legislature created a work group that issued a report in December of 2018 on mental health access for first responders that cites that the routine exposure of first responders to traumatic events and devastating circumstances puts them at a high risk of experiencing a range of health and mental health consequences, such as Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) and PTSD, compassion fatigue and burnout; and

WHEREAS, the 85th Texas Legislature work group report concluded that a multi-faceted approach that includes peer support, Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) teams, policies standardizing provision of mental health services (public and private), and comprehensive mental health insurance coverage,

including workers compensation insurance coverage is needed to properly support and manage mental health needs among first responders; and

WHEREAS, federal laws like the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and the Family and Medical Leave Act ensure privacy and protection from employment retaliation for first responders participating in mental health evaluations; and

WHEREAS, internal mental health resources like staff psychologists and peer support are critical to the health and wellbeing of first responders and their families; and

WHEREAS, Texas state law does not protect first responders from employment retaliation for voluntarily participating in internal methods like peer support that support and manage mental health needs; and

WHEREAS, it is a chief responsibility of local government to ensure that its citizens are protected and kept safe in their daily lives and establish institutions that properly carry out this responsibility; and

WHEREAS, Council has taken an initial step in addressing first responder mental health by approving Resolution #20190221-013; and

WHEREAS, a “first responder”, as identified in the Texas Government Code (TGC) § 421.095 as “a public safety employee or volunteer whose duties include responding rapidly to an emergency.” This includes peace officers, fire protection personnel, and emergency medical services; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The City Manager is directed to develop a report that thoroughly explains and identifies gaps and opportunities for improvement regarding:

- 1) the current options available to first responders to support and manage mental health needs,
- 2) best practices and innovations that support and manage mental health needs,
- 3) if and how the efficacy of mental health evaluations has been determined,
- 4) how privacy measures are maintained, how mental health evaluations and procedures comply with federal law, and how employees are protected from retaliation for disclosing personal mental health conditions and needs,
- 5) the current state of health care insurance coverage for first responders within their respective departments, and
- 6) the unique, on-the-job experiences that first responders deal with daily.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to obtain input from the City Auditor, the Public Safety Commission, the City of Austin Firefighters', Police Officers' and Emergency Medical Services Personnel Civil Service Commission, the City of Austin/Travis County Emergency Services District Coordinating Committee, and the respective employment associations for Austin Police Department, Austin Fire Department, and Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to bring forth a plan and status to provide recommendations no later than August 28, 2019.

ADOPTED: _____, 2019

ATTEST: _____
Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk