

February 15, 2022

Members of the Senate Judiciary and Criminal Justice Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, we are writing in support of SF 2934. It is essential to public safety that we prioritize the mental health and wellness of everyone in our community. This includes caring for our first responders who are regularly exposed to traumatic events as part of their duties. Too often, we know law enforcement officers can face discrimination out of fear that sharing struggles with their mental health is a sign of weakness. While cultures in departments across state are changing, first responders need continued support and access to treatment from people who understand the difficulties of the job.

We're grateful for the work of this committee in the past to support Critical Incident Stress Management and peer support services. The investments in SF 2934 are another important step in prioritizing wellness for first responders and it is important that these investments continue to follow best practices that have developed in recent years. NAMI's national office worked with the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) in 2018 to release a report with recommendations for maintaining police mental health. The report recommended preservice education and training about mental health and trauma, as well as embedding supports into departments such as EAP programs, peer-to-peer support programs, dedicated staff for resources and referrals, and off-site mental health professionals hired by the department to provide privacy and safety for responders who seek help. We also recommend that officers have an annual check-in with a therapist, not as a punitive measure to "catch" officers who are struggling, but as a supportive and confidential way for people to seek help and prioritize wellness in such a difficult job.

Thank you again for your time and attention to mental health in this committee. We are glad to support SF 2934 and happy to continue this discussion.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH  
Executive Director

Elliot Butay  
Criminal Justice Coordinator