

To whom it may concern,

My name is Jamiel Mohammad. I am an active Police Officer with the city of Minneapolis. I have been doing this job for 16+ years. During this time, I have been exposed to several incidents that the everyday public is not exposed to. Some of these incidents go away, but some live with you and change you forever. Some of these incidents wake you from your sleep in the middle of the night. Some prevent you from falling asleep. Some prevent you from holding any type of a relationship with people that have not been exposed to the same trauma and don't understand. I'm told its normal and human nature to be affected by these traumatic events. I'm also told of ways to deal with the stresses of these traumatic events.

I am writing this letter today to ask the State of Minnesota to Support Heroes Helping Heroes Organization. This organization holds events for people like me, people who have served to help our communities and are now feeling the side effects of the traumatic incidents that we are exposed to on a regular basis. I have participated in such events and can tell you firsthand how it helps in the healing process and helping forget some of that trauma. Any clinical study will show that the things that help heal stresses from our jobs is getting out with friends and people that have been through the same experiences and do something you enjoy. Heroes Helping Heroes allows us to do this. They have gotten me in touch with old friends that I would probably never have seen again. As a group, we help each other with our trauma's and help each other cope with them so we can be better in our families, our jobs, and our communities. In my opinion, this process helps more than therapy or medications.

I still love my job and love helping the people of Minneapolis. I want to be healthy and the best capable in doing this. Heroes Helping Heroes helps me with this.

Please support Heroes Helping Heroes Organization in way possible so we can continue to heal and build stronger communities as human beings!

Please feel free to call me or email me if you have any questions or need any other information from me.

Jamiel Mohammad

Dear Ms. Cook-

I wanted to take the time to reach out and express the importance of Heroes Helping Heroes.

I retired as a Sergeant with the Minneapolis Police department last year after almost 34 years.

Not only seeing the horrible things that police officers see in their careers on a daily basis, many of us had to work and deal with the riots during the George Floyd incident. Many of us struggled afterwards with dealing with the after affects from working this.

Heroes Helping Heroes is an amazing organization that brings First Responders together for social outings to spend time with others who understand what the others have gone through. Whether you use this as an opportunity to share and gain support from others in the group, or just decide to have fun, this organization is helped many, many people in just the short amount of time that it's been up and running. I've participated in several events sponsored by HHH and it has been an incredible experience for me.

The fact that these are events are paid for by Heroes Helping Heroes, further encourages first responders to participate. I know any additional funding that can go towards this organization will allow it to continue to provide for First Responders that are very much in need.

Thank you,

Sgt. Shannon Barnette (Ret.)

Minneapolis Police Department

To the MN State Legislature,

My name is Justin Sabo. I'm writing to you about news I received that a bill will be introduced in the MN Senate to provide funding for Heroes Helping Heroes. Specifically, I'm writing to express my support for this bill and to briefly describe to you the impact the organization has had on me.

I first became aware of the organization through a news article I read online in 2021. I was a Deputy Sheriff for the Anoka County Sheriff's Office in Andover, MN. I started in 2003, and recently medically retired, what we call a "Duty Disability Retirement" in June of 2021 after 18 years of service. I had also served in the U.S. Army for approximately 9 years, deploying twice overseas. I was wounded by an IED blast in Samarra, Iraq in July 2005, and was later awarded the Purple Heart Medal.

In June of 2020, on my 41st birthday, and having just returned to my regularly scheduled shift in the Patrol Division after responding for 5 nights to the Minneapolis Riots, I responded to a report of a drunk driver who had hit another vehicle, injuring that driver. The drunk driver fled the scene, and I was able to intercept him while enroute to assist the wounded party. During the course of arresting the drunk driving suspect, we would go to the ground, the weight of both of our bodies landing on my knee cap, breaking it into 2 pieces. Emergency orthopedic surgery and 9 months of physical therapy would soon follow, and I would eventually learn from my surgeon that I would not be cleared to return to full duty, starting the process of filing for Duty Disability Retirement from the MN Public Employee Retirement Association (PERA).

All of my adult life has been dedicated to serving my community. First in the military, and then as a Law Enforcement Officer. This realization that the journey was over for me, 13 years before I had planned to retire, was devastating. It caused an unbelievable amount of stress as I began the process of evaluating what would come next. I had an opportunity to attend one of the breakfast events that Heroes Helping Heroes organizes. I stayed for 2 hours. I met wonderful people who were in the varying stages of the same process as I, and the conversations we had gave me hope, hope for the chance of a better tomorrow, of a path moving forward that could be just as rewarding and meaningful as my career in public service that was ending prematurely.

I intend on continuing to be an active member and supporter of the wonderful work this organization does. I want to be able to share the feeling of hope I experienced when sharing time with other Law Enforcement Officers who had experienced what I had. Those dealing with the stress and mental health issues that accompany this period of transition need to know that there is a brighter future ahead of them and that their legacy of service doesn't stop just because the job does. I've made the transition. I'm proud to have found an organization where I can continue to serve others, and I am currently the Director of Military and Charitable

Programs at Freedom Alliance, a non-profit organization whose mission is to honor and support wounded soldiers, active-duty service members and their families.

Please support this bill that would provide funding to Heroes Helping Heroes. Our First Responders take on a debt that society can never fully repay. They often carry the scars of their service, some visible and many more invisible, for a lifetime. As a society, we owe it to our protectors to support their transition when they are injured / experience trauma as a result of their service.

Heroes Helping Heroes is a 501(c)(3) organization designed to provide non-medical support to assist law enforcement officers, fire personnel and EMS personnel (collectively, "First Responders") coping with mental health issues stemming from their employment, specifically Post Traumatic Stress Disorder ("PTSD"). Heroes Helping Heroes hosts social events, both large and small, for all active and retired First Responders living with work-related mental health injuries. For more information, please visit <https://heroeshelpingheroesmn.com/>

Respectfully,

Justin Sabo

February 12th, 2022

Members of Congress,

My name is Adam Lepinski and I am an active member with Heroes Helping Heroes. I have been a member since the beginning of the organization, and I know firsthand the positive impact this organization has made in my life and so many others lives. Heroes Helping Heroes is an organization that focuses on the mental health of first responders. They do this by planning and organizing group events, such fishing, hunting, golf, sporting events and many other types of outings. These events provide a “safe” and positive environment for first responders to talk with others about their mental health challenges, gain new friendships and learn about what resources are available to them.

In addition to being a member of Heroes Helping Heroes, I am also an active law enforcement officer with 16 years of service. I know firsthand that today’s law enforcement officers are facing enormous challenges, to include but not limited to increasing gun violence, public scrutiny, and a drastic shortage of officers. These challenges take a toll on the mental well-being of officers, and they need a positive outlet like Heroes Helping Heroes to help them. I have personally attended numerous Heroes Helping Heroes events and found that it has really helped me cope with the stressors of the job. I’ve had a very positive experience with this organization, gained new friendships and talked openly with others about my own mental health.

In 2018, a friend of mine, and a fellow police officer, reached his breaking point with his mental health demons. He died by suicide. I wish there would have been something more I could have done for him. I wish he could have taken advantage of an organization like Heroes Helping Heroes to help him through his struggles. Unfortunately, this type of tragedy occurs all too often and especially among first responders.

Like any non-profit organization, the more funding that is available, the more individuals they can provide service too. With additional funding, Heroes Helping Heroes could expand to other areas of Minnesota, hold more events, and provide service to more members. I respectfully request your consideration to pass the proposed bill, which would allow Heroes Helping Heroes the ability to expand and continue to help first responders all across the great state of Minnesota. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Adam Lepinski
Police Sergeant / H3 Member

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is regarding Heroes Helping Heroes Minnesota, and the impact it has had concerning my mental health. I left a career in law enforcement after nearly 20 years. I did not want to leave this beloved noble profession that I had dedicated my life to, but I had to. I struggled and continued to struggle with the decision to leave and with all of the incidents I took place in during this career.

Besides seeing a psychologist there was really no other mentally healthy way I found to meet with others going through the same feelings as I was. That all changed when I found Heroes Helping Heroes. I have taken part in different events hosted and sponsored by this great organization. It not only has introduced me to new constructive hobbies, but I have also had the opportunity to meet some amazing people that are going through the same trauma. I wish we had all been able to meet earlier, but it gives me comfort and a feeling of solidarity that I am not alone attempting to heal, move forward, and also figure out how to start a professional life over again at such an older age.

I am writing this letter, which I have never done before for any other organization in hopes for funding to continue what Heroes Helping Heroes has already begun. In closing I want to emphasize how much this organization has helped me, my family, and countless other officers and deputies that have been able to take advantage of these events. This program has saved lives, and I believe with additional funding it will help even more.

Respectfully,

Aaron Collins

Ret. Minneapolis Police Sergeant

Minnesota State Legislature
100 Reverend Martin Luther King Dr
St. Paul, MN 55155

To whom it may concern,

I am pleased to provide my support and recommendation for the non-profit group, Heroes Helping Heroes. Heroes Helping Heroes is an organization, Chris Steward founded in response to the lack of resources available for police officers suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress. Heroes Helping Heroes hosts social events, both large and small, for all active and retired First Responders living with work-related mental health injuries.

I am a retired police officer who left the profession in 2013. Before that time, I began to address many of the traumatic events experienced on the job. I was single, living alone, and fighting my demons and thoughts of suicide, quietly while using alcohol to numb my thoughts in order to be able to fall asleep. Through my own trauma and recovery work, my motivation to live was rediscovered with the help of the community of peers I had to support me, along with my family, and of course, Almighty God. I was able to find resiliency in my trauma, completed graduate school and became licensed as a Professional Clinical Counselor and Alcohol and Drug Counselor. I currently work as a Clinical Director, oversee a Co-Occurring Substance Use Disorder Program and DBT-Blue, a DBT program designed for police officers.

According to a report conducted by the Department of Justice, 'peer driven support provides a source of help for first responders unwilling to bring their problems to mental health professionals because they mistrust "shrinks." Individuals feel they are stigmatized for not being able to handle their own problems or are afraid that entering therapy might hurt their careers (Finn & Tomz, 1997).

The report notes, while peer supporters cannot provide the level of service professionals can, peers can refer receptive officers in need of help to professional counselors. When a referral comes from a trusted peer, many officers are more likely to take advantage of counseling services than if they have to make an appointment on their own or follow the suggestion of a family member or program clinician. In my experience, Heroes Helping Heroes has earned the title of "credible" with many of my clients who have participated in the activities provided and have reported a newfound sense of autonomy being in the presence of others with similar issues.

I fully support Heroes Helping Heroes goal to expand outreach and support for first responders. Assistance includes resume workshops for retired first responders who wish to return to the workforce. Heroes Helping Heroes is actively seeking more partners in the community, that can also assist in this and other activities.

I hope that you will favorably consider this organization's needs, as they continue to work to support our first responders and their families. I am familiar with other voluminous professional literature concerning the therapeutic benefits of peer led support. Upon request, I will share citations of other relevant studies that supports this avenue of support.

Gratefully,

Nicholas Weidner, MA, LADC, LPCC

Clinical Director/Psychotherapist

Life Development Resources, PA.

References:

Finn, P., & Tomz, J. E. (1997). *Developing a law enforcement stress program for officers and their families*. Abt Associates.

Dear Angela Cook,

Heroes Helping Heroes

In 2020, I was diagnosed with PTSD after a 20-year career in Law Enforcement. I became very anti-social, suffered from severe anxiety and depression and all my physical symptoms were getting worse. In 2021, I found Heroes Helping Heroes. Coupled with professional counseling, H3 made a huge positive impact on my coping and healing. The non-profit offered free social events that were safe from judgement, where I could show up, be myself, and continue to heal and bond with others that are struggling with PTSD. The events I participate in like horseback riding, coffee gatherings, painting and camping are centered around healthy social activities and interactions that I would normally shy away from due to my anxiety and the social stigma of suffering from PTSD. After dealing with 20+ years of traumatic events, I did not realize how much of that affected my participation in day-to-day life. H3 helped me to see past my traumatic experiences, my PTSD diagnosis and allowed me to have healthy, healing experiences with others. H3 made more of an impact than I even realized. Looking back, I know now, just how much I needed H3 and all they have to offer. Day to day, my life choices are on a much more positive path, and I have H3 to thank for that! They give first responders hope and a safe and healthy place to go when they can't see past the trauma they have experienced.

Sincerely,

Lindsay Herron

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing a brief statement to share my personal story of how Heroes Helping Heroes has made a positive impact in my life.

In late 2020, I unknowingly worked my last shift as a police officer after 16 years. I sought mental health treatment and was later diagnosed with PTSD in early 2021. After my diagnosis, I began to feel alone after losing a big part of my identity. I felt broken and ashamed as if there was something wrong with me.

This was until I attended my first Heroes Helping Heroes event. I was apprehensive to attend at first not knowing what to expect. However, after having a chance to connect with others and their families it was apparent this is a wonderful organization. Everyone was welcoming and kind.

Having a chance to connect with others who have faced the same or similar situations and “walked in my shoes” has made a world of difference in my feeling of self-worth. After attending just one event, I’m happy to report that I no longer feel broken or ashamed and have begun to embrace my PTSD diagnosis.

Please seriously consider this bill that would provide Heroes Helping Heroes with funding.

Thank you,

Cody Foss

Hello,

My name is Tyler Grandstrand. I live in Woodbury. I'm employed by the state of Minnesota as a lieutenant at the Minnesota Correctional Facility at Oak Park Heights. I have been there for over 16 years. I come to you asking you to really look at and approve the bill that will fund Heroes Helping Heroes. Policing and some first responders are not in the greatest of line right now. But there are still way more than good. And this organization helps. I'd like to tell you, my story. I was barely 24 years old when I started as a correctional officer in October of 2005. I made a measly \$11.25 an hour. I was taught from my dad that it's never about money. It's about doing what you like and are happy. I had a one-year plan. I would be there a year and then move onto something better, or what I thought was better. I loved the job. I stayed. The job was never fun. It's a maximum-security prison. It's never going to be fun. But it's a good job with a lot of great people. Then in 2018 the job got very real and very scary. We had a sergeant get assaulted really bad. Emergency surgery and a stay in the hospital. A very scary assault on 5 officers in our gym. Then on July 18, 2018, the unthinkable happened in what we call our backyard. Officer Joe Gomm was brutally murdered at the Stillwater facility. I was driving on a road in Woodbury when one of my buddies another lieutenant called and told me. As I pulled my car over, I sat there and cried. Senator I didn't know at that time who the officer was that was killed but really it didn't matter. It was one of us. There was a lot about that some good some bad. Officer Gomm's funeral was a humbling experience and one of the worst things I've ever been a part of. Just as we were able to start breathing a little it hit us again. This time within our walls. Officer Joe Parise passed away after a medical emergency after responding to a staff assault. These wounds just couldn't heal. Things started to get a little better after these tragedies at work. But there was something lurking that a lot of officers and other staff didn't see coming. Senator I'm a happy go lucky guy that likes people. But I was changing, and I didn't see it. I changed so much so that it put so much strain on my marriage that I separated from my wife. We did the couples therapy and all that stuff. I'm lucky enough to be married to a woman who's super smart and happens to be a mental health nurse practitioner. She knew what I had but she can't diagnose me with anything. So, while we were separated after stopping being the cool guy and accepting there's something wrong with me. I seemed help. I was diagnosed with PTSD. I literally said no I don't or everyone in our profession has it. The truth is that's not true. Some people don't. It was about 5 months later I did something and for me I joined Heroes Helping Heroes. I'm back home. My marriage is better than ever. I truly have this organization for helping me. Not everyone needs a therapist and a couch. This organization does wonders for not just me but for many people. I ask you to really look at this and pass the bill to help fund this organization. Thank you for your time.

Tyler Grandstrand

Angela,

I am a retired Minneapolis Police Officer and also worked for 6 other police agencies in Minnesota both before and after my 26 years with Minneapolis. In total, along with my current service with a federal agency, I have 43 years in!

Although this service is something I would not trade for anything, it comes with a certain price in emotional and physical pain. Police work is unique in that it is something most people do not want to hear about, talk about, or even think about because there are some very ugly parts to it and it takes special people to perform it. As a result, one feels that association with others who have been there is helpful because it is often the only group you can speak freely and vent to.

This group allows those who have been there and worked the street to associate even after retirement and continue to have a resource for the strong emotional bond that is developed during service. I have personally had two officers call me when they were about to commit suicide and fortunately was able to change their mind. This group allows an outlet for feelings that if left unaided, all too often result in suicide, drug use, alcoholism, and family troubles.

I hope this bill passes, and that the sacrifices the police officers make and have made can be acknowledged.

Respectfully,

Jerry Johnson

Hello Angela,

Just a quick note to let you know how wonderful this program is. I am a Navy Veteran and was also a firefighter for 7 years. Heroes Helping Heroes does wonderful things for retired police, EMT's, and firefighters who are suffering with PTSD. I served at Ground Zero in NYC on 9/11 and for several days after. As you can imagine, I saw all sorts of horrible things that have stuck with me over the years. It is wonderful for me to be able to attend the Heroes Helping Heroes events, and to speak with other first responders that have been through other traumatic experiences.

I encourage the Senate to support this program financially, and in any other means possible. First responders need organizations like this one that care about what service people have experienced, and the PTSD that we suffer as a result. Thank you in advance for listening to me, and for supporting Heroes Helping Heroes.

Warm regards,
Scott Stevenson

Members of Congress,

I am writing to you as a retired Law Enforcement Officer with 18 years of service who is wishing to stress the importance of a non-profit 501.C(3) which provides a source of support and relief which fills a void as many departments and agencies across the state fall short.

I found Heroes Helping Heroes while battling with the challenges of PTSD. I watched many events hosted by H3 come and go over several months, being hesitant to participate. In mid-October I took a step and attended an H3 event which really connected to me and allowed me to be comfortable in a group setting with complete strangers.

I was selected to attend a free, all expenses paid, pheasant hunt at a game farm in southern Minnesota. On the day of the event, I had the pleasure to spend the afternoon working my dogs and connecting with five other H3 members, sharing family and life stories, laughing, and enjoying a stress-free relaxing afternoon in the fall.

Attending this H3 event allowed me to break down some barriers I struggle with daily and made me realize I was not alone in my strife's. I was also able to start a friendship with a fellow member who shares several same interests as I do.

As time has passed, I continually see H3 offering events which not only benefit retired law enforcement, EMS and fire fighters but active personnel as well.

In a time where stress is at an all-time high for public safety service employees, I cannot think of a better non-profit organization to receive funding support other than Heroes Helping Heroes.

Respectfully,

Tim Schwab

I am a medically retired police officer with PTSD. I am no longer able to work because of my condition. Heroes Helping Héroes has been very beneficial to me. It's an opportunity to get together with other first responders struggling with the same or similar issues. This organization provides opportunities for activity and friendships with other first responders who are suffering too. These relationships are crucial to my healing and living a better quality of life. There is no other group available in Minnesota like this. First responders have difficulty sharing problems with civilians who can be overwhelmed by our trauma or misunderstand and cause us further pain. But we can help each other because we understand each other. We have been there.

Please support this bill to provide needed funding for this crucial program. I have been a police officer for 27 years before retiring. I wish this program had been around years ago. They have a good thing going here and I hope it will be here for years to come. It saves lives.

Aine Bebeau

Angela,

I am writing to you to express the impact HHH has had on my life since I medically retired from the Minneapolis Police Department in October 2020. I worked 31 years on the department and to say the least my last two years were more physically and mentally draining on myself and my family. I worked 90% of my career on the street in the tough neighborhoods including 28 years on the SWAT team doing high risk warrants. In the end I was not where I thought I would be or wanted to be after serving that many years. My relationship with my wife of 33 years was the worst it has been, my drinking and emotions were out of control and my mental health was at a level I have never seen or could ever imagine.

After deciding to retire this did not get much better. As I continued to go through therapy, I learned of HHH and what they were doing for officers like me. The support and avenues that HHH offered helped me start and continue to get over that hump and to a more normal life. The programs and outings that HHH offers with others going through the same things I was and is extremely helpful. I am a proud man and loved doing my job as an officer. To me, and others I have learned, it is hard to say you need help. The support that HHH gives, helps us say it's alright.

I have two sons in law enforcement and have seen many of my partners and my son's partners deal with what I am going through. I have helped others see things will get better and have turned them onto HHH. Not only do I participate in HHH programs I support with donations. Please know that HHH deserves and needs our lawmakers support to help the men and women that give their minds, bodies, relationships, and lives to keep other safe communities safe.

Thank you,

Bill Kenow

Retired Minneapolis Police Department

To whom it may concern:

I would like to provide a brief explanation of how Heroes Helping Heroes has impacted my life. I lost my police career in September 2020 due to a PTSD diagnosis. It's a devastating process to realize you are no longer able to perform the duties within your police career. This is more than just a loss of a job; it was losing my profession, career, identity and, unfortunately, friendships, connections, and "family" within the law enforcement community.

When you abruptly stop going to work and serving the community, it's very isolating and depressing. This is even more difficult to process when already diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder due to trauma related work injuries. It's difficult to make connections with others as you feel like they won't understand your story and struggles. Heroes Helping Heroes fills that void.

Heroes Helping Heroes is an organization that connects people going through similar experiences after being involved in such traumatic and life-altering experiences. They open the door to opportunity for positive interactions, networking with new connections and providing an environment that is safe, uplifting, and social. The activities range from a large variety of interests that can apply to anyone.

The moment I was introduced to and signed up to be a part of Heroes Helping Heroes, my email inbox has been flooded with fun activities that have helped me get out of the house and meet new people. From a simple breakfast that was filled with great conversation to attending a MN Wild game. Having the ability to branch out and keep connections has meant the world to me. It's been a positive light while navigating dark times.

In this time in our society, Heroes Helping Heroes is a much needed organization that is helping a group of people that are more than just police officers. They are husbands, wives, mothers and fathers and we all have unseen, and devastating stories to work through. It's extremely important to not go through the journey alone. Heroes Helping Heroes keeps us connected and we have the ability to help each other.

Thank you for your time in listening to how this organization has positively impacted my life.

Taylor Jacobs

Hello Angela,

I'm writing on behalf of Hero's Helping Heroes of MN.

I'm a Paramedic working in downtown Minneapolis for Hennepin County Medical Center.

I would like to ask for your support with passing the bill that will help with funding.

They are a great organization that has given me the opportunity to get out and be around and comfortable with other professionals who have experienced similar issues.

My job comes with a lot of stress and can increase anxiety and depression.

Having peers who know what it's like to deal with those stressors can really make a difference with coping.

Thank you for your time and support.

Hollie Jones

HCMC Paramedic

Date: 02-13-2022

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter to express my appreciation for the Heroes Helping Heroes foundation. I have been fortunate to have attended three events this past year. The first events I attended were a fishing trip to Duluth Minnesota, an afternoon of boating on Lake Minnetonka and a Minnesota Wilds hockey game.

By attending these events I was able meet First Responders from around the state. This gave me an opportunity listen to the different types of struggles many are suffering with PTSD from their related profession. Some of these people are currently still working while others has chosen to leave the profession on a medical leave.

These events allow us to talk openly in a judgement free zone about how the stress of the profession has affected our life's including personal relationships. We can "bounce ideas" as to what has helped us individually deal with these concerns and give referrals if need be. In some case's we have exchanged phone numbers and emails, letting each other know we're just a phone call away if we need someone to talk to.

Heroes Helping Heroes programs offer a variety of events and gatherings to let First Responders come together and relax with one another. Heroes Helping Heroes is a great resource for First Responders to cope with PTSD and related struggles in a judgement free zone. Often First Responders are reluctant to reach out for help and this gives us an opportunity to take that next step.

Sincerely,

Dave Burbank
Retired Minneapolis Police Officer 32 years

Good morning,

I am writing this statement in support of Hero's Helping Hero's Minnesota. I have attended the monthly breakfast events. I have plans to attend more events once my health stabilizes.

As you age and have limits due to a disability your world gets smaller day buddy day. H3 provides services, activities, and most importantly support and friendship to the hundreds of First Responders that suffer in silence due to Mental and Physical injuries.

We need to look at all we do for Veterans and begin to apply that standard to MN First Responders.

Thank you in advance for any favorable action you can give H3!

CLS
Goodhue County, MN

I would just like to let you know that I have participated in heroes helping heroes and it's something that you can't explain how it helps myself and fellow public servants!! I have been involved in public service for 30+ years and to have an organization show their appreciation, I cannot explain in words what it means. I have been blessed to experience what I and my peers have been through and been able to talk about together!! I hope that my experience is something that you can appreciate as much as I do!!

-Tim Adler

Dear Ms. Cook,

I am writing as a supporting member of Hero's helping Hero's.

I am a retired Minneapolis Park Police Sergeant.

I am diagnosed with PTSD.

I work very hard not to SUFFER from PTSD.

An obvious trigger is all the rhetoric and continued negative, ignorant statements about police officers and police work. Unfortunately, in the last several years emotions have superseded facts.

I was a lifelong resident of Minneapolis who went into Law Enforcement in my mid 30's because I believed I could help and serve my friends and neighbors and residents of the city. I did help many people, built many positive relationships and caught many bad guys. I loved police work.

I retired 'early' after 18 years due to overwhelming trauma. One of the problems ended up being living where I worked. There were very few places I could go in Mpls anymore that did not evoke memories, some good but more and more bad. Another major issue was the lack of support from politicians and administrators.

I left my department feeling I was abandoning my co-workers, leaving them behind. Several years later I moved 4plus hours away from Minneapolis and began my healing.

I have only ever asked for one other piece of legislation supporting police officers and citizens of Minnesota and that was amended language to the Flee on foot statute.

I am asking you to please support funding for Hero's helping Hero's.

This is an organization working to support people who have given much to their career, calling and community.

In these times where all cops are lumped together as (insert negative label du jour) it would be so helpful and healing to show support for the majority of officers who have given and lost so much.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

I'm hopeful.

Sincerely,
Anne M Deneen

Grand Marais, MN

To Whom it May Concern:

I spent nearly 10 years in policing before I was mentally unable to do the job anymore as a result of PTSD. I struggled for a very long time while on the job and did not have an outlet I felt comfortable in to share my feelings for fear of losing my job or being labeled as inept. After leaving policing I felt disconnected and did not have anyone with similar experiences around me to support me any longer. Relationships with people at work slowly died off and I lost my sense of belonging that I shared with them; I was left feeling alone and unsupported by those who would be able to truly understand what it is we, as Police Officers, go through and struggle with on a daily basis on the job. The incidents we are a part of, and experience together form a bond and when that bond is gone one is left trying to figure out who they are now and what they will be in the future.

After leaving policing my wife found Heroes Helping Heroes and encouraged me to join. At my first event, which was a simple gathering for breakfast, I was struck by the openness of the members discussing their struggles and symptoms of PTSD, this was not something that was talked about when on the job. I was very encouraged by the fact that there were other people out there like me that have been through similar incidents and struggles, I didn't feel alone anymore. Nobody there judges or makes anyone feel ashamed for their struggles, in fact they are embraced and talked about. We support one another to try and get back to where we were before all the chaos made simple things like being out in public with our family so difficult.

This organization has helped me realize that I am not alone and that I don't have to go through PTSD by myself and unsupported like I felt when I left my department. This is something that is especially important for Police Officers right now given the climate of policing, it leaves us feeling isolated in our own profession, unable to interact with others for fear of being labeled as a bad person or part of the cultural problem of racial inequity. When you leave the job, you feel like you don't have anything to be a part of anymore. Not only are you left feeling alone you lose the sense that you can make a difference in the world as you did on the job. H3 has provided those things to me. I know there are many others out there that I can talk to and not feel ashamed. I know that I can still make a difference in the other members lives by sharing our experiences and supporting each other. I feel like I can still make a positive influence which is why I got into policing to start with.

I know there are members of H3 that are still on the job, I believe this organization to be very beneficial to them as well. They are providing a safe place to be with others and feel supported to talk about their feelings and problems without being fearful of what the consequences may be if they shared the same information with those at their workplace. I loved my job, I loved the people, the impact I could make on the world, helping people, making a difference in people's lives in a positive way, I wish I could still do it. I don't know how H3 would have impacted me

while I was still on the job or if it would have been enough to help me stay working but I sure wish I would have had the opportunity to see if it did.

There isn't a magic solution to PTSD, this organization isn't a cure all, but it does provide me with a sense of belonging and the ability to see that I am not alone, and those things are detrimental to one's mental wellbeing. It has provided me with some of the confidence that I lost, some of the camaraderie and some of the feeling that I am still able to help others and inspire positive change for people. These things, I feel, will help me along my journey and my family and I are grateful for that.

During this current political and cultural climate supporting cops is not something that is a popular opinion. There are those who feel isolated from the police and treated differently and rightfully so, but one could argue that the current climate does the same to the cops. This isn't the way towards a positive change, this is simply refusing to come together to find a solution as a people. We need to work together to enact positive change and the mental wellbeing of our first responders should be prioritized just as much as the other factors that contributed to where we are now as a country. You can't expect cops and other first responders to fix the problem if they are dealing with problems themselves that were created by trying to help others in the first place. More and more people, NFL players, celebrities, politicians, are coming out and talking about their trauma, they are taking breaks from their jobs to assess their mental needs. Many of these people have one or a handful of traumatic incidents, first responders have that many in one shift, yet we expect them to carry on without talking about it because they aren't allowed to have problems, or they can't be effective in the job. This is unfair and contradictory to the arguments of some in this country. H3 provides first responders with much needed respite and encouragement, something that is necessary to ultimately move forward with correcting the issues we are facing together as a country.

Thank you for your time and support.

Brandon Kelting

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this to address the impact that Heroes Helping Heroes has had on my life.

My name is Jessica Donahue and I have been employed for 21 years as a police officer for the City of Crystal. On July 16, 2020, I was intentionally ran over by a suspect's vehicle as he was trying to avoid being arrested after a police chase that ended in our city. The incident left me with several physical injuries, including surgery to replace my MPFL ligament. I knew my injuries were visible on the outside, but the biggest lasting scar was the one it took on my mental health.

I struggle with insomnia, nightmares, and panic attacks. I have been seeking help through my psychologist, Dr Susan Powers Olson. She told me about Heroes Helping Heroes at one of our sessions, and I joined last summer after reaching out to Chris Steward.

I have been actively participating in several events such as a Minnesota Wild game, wine tasting, monthly breakfast/coffee gatherings and most recently an ice fishing trip to Red Lake. This organization has allowed me to meet other first responders that share a common issue- PTSD. I am able to feel a little sense of normalcy while bonding with others. I can truly say that these people have become like family. Please consider helping fund this organization. Chris Steward has worked tirelessly to help those who gave everything to the communities they helped protect and serve.

Sincerely,

Jessica Donahue

I am writing on behalf of myself and many others to ask for support for Heroes Helping Heroes (H3) as they have been instrumental in supporting first responders.

Too often first responders are asked to do tasks for millions of strangers. These honorable heroes carry this weight of sights and sounds experienced, often without thanks.

Unfortunately, this task too often creates an unbearable weight that cannot be carried alone. H3 is an organization that helps these brave men and women carry the weight. Having been lucky enough to receive the benefits from H3, I can say this is true. A good support system is vital to ensure our first responders are healthy to be there for the citizens of MN. This support system also helps accomplish other very important jobs.... being a good spouse, parent, friend, co-worker, and a healthy person.

We implore you to please support the bill for funding to H3 so that current and future first responders can benefit from this great organization. The lives of first responders and the communities they serve depend on it.

Thank you for your time.

To whom it may concern-

Hello- My name is Johnny Mercil. I have 25 years of law enforcement experience and retired from the Minneapolis PD in May due to PTSD and related issues.

I became a "member" of Heroes Helping Heroes in the summer of 2021 soon after the organization was created. I have attended many events and have had positive experiences with the organization and the other members. Leaving my career in Law enforcement due to my diagnosis and subsequent issues related to PTSD has been very difficult.

Many of the people I have known who have left under these circumstances seem to close themselves off from their peers and former coworkers due to the negative Experiences and negative stigma associated with the PTSD diagnosis. A lot of us still suffer from the effects of PTSD on a daily basis. This has affected our day-to-day lives in many ways.

The events that were planned and hosted by H3 were the first social gatherings that I attended after leaving my career. Many of the negative thoughts and feelings I was experiencing kept me from participating in many social activities. Once I began going to these events, it opened my eyes up to the reality that there are many people that are in the same boat as me. Being Around first responders and likeminded people with shared experiences has helped me to adjust some of my thought processes and social hesitancy, which in turn helps me to Connect with others.

Being a member has been a positive experience and I believe that this organization, Heroes Helping Heroes, is helping its members adjust to their lives after the PTSD diagnosis. H3 is founded on The same principles that the members have embraced throughout their careers as first responders: A sense of duty and giving back to members of the community.

I support H3 because they, and their members, have supported me during some of the most difficult times in my life. I hope this organization has the means to continue providing services and events in the future for former and current First responders.

Thanks for your time.

Johnny

My name is Shawn Laughton. I cannot express how great H3 has been for me. I have attended a few events like fishing, camping and breakfasts and it was extremely fantastic knowing I was surrounded by likeminded people who have experienced things similar to my in their own careers. I believe this organization would be a great opportunity for many other first responders in the future. Thank you for your time

Shawn Laughton
Fire Motor Operator
Minneapolis Fire Department

TO: The Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety Finance and Policy

RE: Heroes Helping Heroes

Honorable Committee Members:

My name is Greg Freeman, and I was a sworn police officer with the City of Minneapolis from 1990 to 2021. During which time I was a Patrol Officer, Gang Investigator, on a Violent Repeat Offender Unit, Gang Task Force Supervisor, Federal Task Force Officer, Violent Crime Investigator, Patrol Supervisor, Weapons Crime Investigator (Sergeant) partnered with the Federal Bureau Alcohol Tobacco Firearms and Explosives, a Shooting Investigator (Sergeant), and at the end I was a Homicide Investigator (Sergeant).

During my career I received many commendations for my work, I was recognized as an expert in my field, and I had a clean disciplinary record.

In 2020 as a result of multiple traumas that I was involved in or witnessed during my career; I was diagnosed with PTSD. In April of 2021 I left behind a career that I had been very proud of and had planned to continue in.

Since then, I have found myself in a position where I have had to rediscover myself. I receive treatment for my PTSD but that is a one-on-one treatment with a psychologist.

Leaving the way that I did carries with it a feeling of stigma and a feeling of isolation from others. For the time of my career there was a mission and a goal to be met as well as a feeling of camaraderie with others who had experienced the same things that I had and when I left this was left behind and it was up to me to find my own path and support.

This is a common feeling that I have heard from other first responders who have left their careers behind. As a group we are driven individuals who are given a goal to achieve and a team that we count on even to the point of protecting our lives. Society asks us to see things and protect society from horrific things that no one wants to see. Many of these things cannot be talked about in polite society but they are still things that have been seen and experienced and can only be understood by those who have been in similar circumstances.

In the Fall of 2021 I began participating in activities with Heroes Helping Heroes including hunting trips and monthly breakfasts. These activities have put me into contact with others who have seen and done some of the same things that I have, and it has given me a chance to be in contact with people who have had some of the same experiences that I have. It has also showed me that there are those in the community who care about first responders and are willing to reach out a helping hand.

I have found a new mission in helping others learn to make fine wood working pieces by volunteering my time and knowledge through Heroes Helping Heroes and other groups helping first responders who are dealing with PTSD.

Heroes Helping Heroes helps to foster a community and sense of mission in its members.

Members feel supported by others who have shared experiences and it also gives members a chance to network and gain opportunities to volunteer or find a new career or gain a new skill that they did not have before.

Being a first responder can often feel like being on an island in the middle of the ocean because of what they are asked to do and see to protect society. Being a first responder who has to leave because of a diagnosis of PTSD or another disability can often feel like being on an island in the middle of the lake on the island in the middle of the ocean and can feel very isolating and give a feeling of being on one's own.

Heroes Helping Heroes gives the first responder a chance to see that they are not alone in their struggles and a message that there is hope that can be found within the community. The group also helps through networking in helping members with preparing for a brighter future. Thank you for your consideration and attention.

Sincerely:

Greg Freeman

Communication is merely an exchange of information, but connection is an exchange of our humanity.

-Sean Stephenson

We all need connection to others. Connection to people who help us feel valued, understood, and accepted. One of the many debilitating factors for those of us with PTSD is feeling isolated from the world around you. Many of us battle with feelings of shame and often struggle with social interactions. We feel misunderstood by even our closest friends and family.

Heroes Helping Heroes provides that feeling of connection that those of us struggling with PTSD desperately need. A community where we can feel understood. While we haven't experienced the same traumas, we have all experienced what trauma can do to a person. Here we find others who know what it is like to struggle with triggers, nightmares, lack of sleep, isolation, constant hypervigilance, and the myriad other symptoms that are hard to truly understand unless you've been in those shoes. It's a place where we don't have to try to explain away our reasons. It provides a place of safety in a world that feels forever unsafe. It helps create equilibrium and balance in a world where there is none and creates a literal lifeline to those who are struggling.

Recent incidents and the resulting media have put a spotlight on public service. The level of scrutiny of these fields is at an all-time high. Real dialogue of how best to serve the public is in its infancy stages at best, further hampered by a variety of high tensions. Officers are leaving their careers in droves. Government pays untold amounts each year on gear and armor to physically protect officers. Multiply that in terms of litigation. How much is being invested in protecting the minds, hearts, and souls of those who serve our communities? How valuable is the mental health of those who serve us day and night?

Today you have an opportunity to provide funding for an organization that protects current and former public servants from the demons they have taken on throughout their careers. It is a step in the right direction. It is a hand reached out in connection when we need it most.

Sincerely,

Angela Strobel