

First Responders Join U.S. Rep. Robin Kelly to Call for Resiliency & Suicide Prevention Resources

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Chicago, IL – Chief James Black and Captain Jeff Dill joined Congresswoman Robin Kelly yesterday to mark Suicide Prevention Month and call for greater access to federal first responder resiliency and wellness resources.

Chief James R. Black, president, Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police, said, “In law enforcement, we need to do a better job of taking care of the people who take care of our communities. More and more police departments are stepping up to do this. Congresswoman Kelly’s bill should make it easier for them to secure grant money to help their officers. This is timely and it is needed.”

“As founder of Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance, I would like to thank Congresswoman Kelly for her thoughtfulness and dedication to my brothers and sisters in the fire, EMS and dispatch world,” said Jeff Dill, founder of the Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance and retired Captain of the Palatine Rural Fire Protection District in Inverness, IL. “Her sponsorship of the First Responder Resiliency Act (H.R. 6003) and support of Congressman Bera's bill H.R. 1646 will allow more organizations to bring behavioral health awareness and training to more members across the U.S.”

Chief Art Acevedo, Chief of Police, Houston, Texas, and President of the Major Cities Chiefs Association, added, “The MCCA thanks Rep. Kelly for her commitment to the health and wellness of our nation’s first responders. Given the multitude of current threats—from COVID-19 and natural disasters to civil unrest and violent crime—it is vitally important that our brave first responders have access to mental health and wellness programs that provide the support they need. The *First Responder Resiliency Act* will play an important role in ensuring these programs are robust and widely available.” Chief Acevedo was unavailable for the call but provided this quote.

Congresswoman Kelly introduced the *First Responder Resiliency Act* (H.R. 6003) in February 2020 after the Chicago Police Department experienced eight officer suicides in 2019. The legislation would waive the matching fund requirement, ranging from five to fifteen percent, for job-related mental health grants under FEMA’s AFG program and DOJ’s COPS program. A Congressional query from Congresswoman Kelly found that less than one percent of AFG grant application and awards in FY17 and FY18 were for job-related mental health programs.

“As our communities have battled the COVID-19 pandemic, the role and importance of our first responders has never been clearer. Legislation like the *Heroes Act* and *First Responder Resiliency Act* show our heroes that Congress stands with them as they protect and serve our communities,” said Congresswoman Kelly. “Tragically, first responders were facing a resiliency crisis long before COVID-19 as suicides claimed more first responders than line of duty deaths over the last five years. It’s time to make more resources available to support wellness and resiliency.”