

# Supporting Fire Fighter Mental Health

The IAFF supports the Helping Emergency Responders Overcome Act and encourages members of Congress to co-sponsor the bill.

## BACKGROUND

Fire fighters and emergency medical responders are routinely eyewitnesses to scenes of catastrophic incidents involving severe injuries, tragic loss of human life and property loss. The cumulative effects of these exposures on emergency personnel may result in psychological injuries and even suicides. Only in recent years has the fire service begun to recognize the link between these professional experiences and post-traumatic stress (PTS) and related behavioral health conditions. Many fire departments lack the capabilities to assist fire fighters by providing counseling, support services and coping tools necessary to treat those suffering from PTS and co-occurring disorders. In the absence of specialized treatment, some fire fighters and emergency medical responders engage in increasingly harmful behaviors including substance abuse, self-harm and suicide. For many, this suffering is a private affair often

kept from co-workers, friends and family. Additionally, there is currently not an existing means to accurately capture data regarding the incidences of fire fighter and emergency medical responder suicide.

The Helping Emergency Responders Overcome (HERO) Act would help address these insufficiencies by identifying best practices to identify, prevent and treat PTS among fire fighters and emergency medical responders. Specifically, the Act will: establish a grant program to provide peer-counseling programs for fire fighters and emergency medical personnel, require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop resources for mental health professionals to better understand the culture of the fire service and evidence-based therapies for mental health issues common to public safety officers, and direct the Centers for Disease Control to collect data on suicides among public safety officers.

## LEGISLATION

**House:** [H.R. 1646, The Helping Emergency Responders Overcome Act of 2019](#)  
Sponsor: Representative Ami Bera (D-CA)

**Summary:** The Helping Emergency Responders Overcome Act of 2019 provides resources to increase recognition and treatment of PTS among emergency responders, provides grants to educate and develop peer counselors and collects data on suicides occurring among emergency responders.