

**Report to  
The Vermont Legislature**

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**Emergency Service Provider Wellness Commission Report  
2025 Report to the Legislature**

**In accordance with 18 V.S.A. § 7257b Emergency Services Provider Wellness Commission**

**Submitted to:** Vermont General Assembly  
Vermont Governor Phil Scott

**Submitted by:** Emergency Service Provider Wellness Commission

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**EMERGENCY SERVICE PROVIDER WELLNESS COMMISSION**  
**2025 Report to the Legislature**

## INTRODUCTION

The Emergency Service Provider Wellness Commission (Commission) within the Agency of Human Services was established in 2021 by 18 V.S.A. § 7257b. The purpose of the Commission is to “consider the diversity of emergency service providers on the basis of gender, race, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability status, and the unique needs that emergency service providers who have experienced trauma may have as a result of their identity status.” Additionally, the Commission is required:

- (1) to identify where increased or alternative supports or strategic investments within the emergency service provider community, designated or specialized service agencies, or other community service systems could improve the physical and mental health outcomes and overall wellness of emergency service providers;
- (2) to identify how Vermont can increase capacity of qualified clinicians in the treatment of emergency service providers to ensure that the services of qualified clinicians are available throughout the State without undue delay;
- (3) to create materials and information, in consultation with the Department of Health, including a list of qualified clinicians, for the purpose of populating an electronic emergency service provider wellness resource center on the Department of Health’s website;
- (4) to educate the public, emergency service providers, State and local governments, employee assistance programs, and policymakers about best practices, tools, personnel, resources, and strategies for the prevention and intervention of the effects of trauma experienced by emergency service providers;
- (5) to identify gaps and strengths in Vermont’s system of care for both emergency service providers who have experienced trauma and their immediate family members to ensure access to support and resources that address the impacts of primary and secondary trauma;
- (6) to recommend how peer support services and qualified clinician services can be delivered regionally or statewide;
- (7) to recommend how to support emergency service providers in communities that are resource challenged, remote, small, or rural;
- (8) to recommend policies, practices, training, legislation, rules, and services that will increase successful interventions and support for emergency service providers to improve health outcomes, job performance, and personal well-being and reduce health risks, violations of employment, and violence associated with the impact of

untreated trauma, including whether to amend Vermont's employment medical leave laws to assist volunteer emergency service providers in recovering from the effects of trauma experienced while on duty; and

- (9) to consult with federal, State, and municipal agencies, organizations, entities, and individuals in order to make any other recommendations the Commission deems appropriate.

This report provides an overview of the Emergency Service Provider Wellness Commission's activities from December 2024 to December 2025 and offers recommendations to improve the mental health and physical health of emergency service providers.

## COMMISSION ACTIVITIES 2024-2025

### **Membership and Meetings**

During the report period, the Commission convened four meetings and welcomed five new representatives. The Commission prioritized promoting peer support networks, reviewing the Vermont Workers Compensation Act, investigating best practices on confidentiality protections for peer support programs, further investigating new and innovative solutions to support the mental health of ESPs, and utilizing existing networks to promote stress injury awareness and prevention training/education and the availability of existing supportive resources

## PRIORITIES

### **Promoted Emergency Services Provider (ESP) Mental Health Conference**

The Castleton Center for Social Justice and Trauma Informed Care hosted a two-day conference at the Vermont State University - Castleton Campus during the Summer of 2025. The Commission promoted the conference across the Commission members' networks to raise awareness of the conference for providers and service organizations.

### **Provided Testimony to House Health Care on Commission Activities and Recommendations**

On Feb 19, 2025 a Commission representative provided testimony to House Health Care. The testimony included an overview of the ESP Wellness Commission, and the 2024 report, and the recommendations of the report.

### **Reassess the Level of Awareness and Knowledge of ESP Mental Health Services and Promote Existing and New Resources (2025-2026 priority)**

The Commission has drafted a survey for all emergency service agencies and providers across the State to reassess the level of awareness and local/regional access to mental health resources. Once the Commission has finalized the survey in early 2026, it will be sent to all emergency service agencies and made available to all providers to participate. The survey results will advance the Commission's mission to identify gaps and strengths in Vermont's system of care for both emergency service providers who have experienced occupation-related stress and trauma.

## **Developing Occupational Stress Injury Training Curriculum for Providers and Organizations**

The Commission continues to devote a substantial amount of time and effort researching and developing training resources to improve awareness of occupational stress-related injuries among the emergency services communities. When the signs and symptoms of occupational stress-related injuries go unnoticed or are left untreated, emergency services providers (ESPs) are at increased risk for anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicide, substance misuse, and other physical health issues. These conditions can result in absenteeism or leave ESPs unable to work, which contributes to greater turnover in the workforce.<sup>1</sup>

The Commission agreed upon a list of learning objectives to address operational stress injuries in first responder communities. The Commission is currently developing an occupational stress injury curriculum. Content will be applicable to all ESP sectors, but capable of sector-specific modification. The planned curriculum includes:

- Learning objectives & content recommendations
- PowerPoint based presentation outline for group presentations (either in-person or virtual), and
- A catalogue of print and video resources

A Learning Management System (LMS) based course example for individual on-line access is also being considered.

The goal of the education is for attendees to learn about the pathophysiology of stress injuries, recognizing signs and symptoms, and self-care practices. Additionally, attendees will learn about risks associated with persistent traumatic exposure, secondary trauma, and how this form of trauma can affect ESPs and their loved ones.

Improving awareness and promoting skills to reduce the negative impact of occupational stress and physiological trauma will keep Vermont's ESPs healthier and better able to respond to emergencies. This training program is urgently needed to improve workforce retention.

## **Increase Awareness and Participation in Emergency Services Provider (ESP) Peer Support Networks**

The Commission continues to work on increasing awareness and participation in ESP peer support networks and improving access to mental health services regardless of agency or sector affiliation.

ESP peer support networks are teams of ESPs trained to provide peer support and often work with the assistance of an embedded mental health counselor(s). These peer support networks assist ESPs, providing guidance and support, including Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, to those experiencing mental health challenges typically caused by responding to a traumatic event.

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<sup>1</sup> CDC. (2024, April 21). Traumatic Incident Stress. Stress at Work.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/stress/traumaticincidentstress/index.html>

SECURE (Skills and Experience for Calling Up Resiliency)

The SECURE program (Skills and Experience for Calling Up Resiliency) is a Vermont-based, peer support network that provides first responders with training in psychological first aid and suicide prevention strategies. Between October 2024 and September 2025, the SECURE network recruited 13 new peer support members to increase the current roster to 84 peer support mentors. This team of peer support mentors represents all ESP sectors, including municipal police officers, county sheriffs, firefighters, EMTs, corrections officers, and ski patrollers. Peer support mentors worked with SECURE counselors to complete 15 critical incident stress debriefings for emergency service organizations, reaching a total of 131 first responders, with an additional 32 peer referrals to a mental health counselor. Many smaller, rural volunteer agencies cannot afford to contract the mental health services essential for ESP health and retention. SECURE collaborates with the other peer support teams including the Green Mountain Critical Incident Stress Management Team (GMCISM). The SECURE program is in high demand as it serves all emergency service organizations regardless of type, ensuring timely and reliable mental health services for all of Vermont's ESPs.

### **Explore Technology-Based Resources for ESP to Access Mental Health Resources**

The Commission explored technology-based resources as a resource which may be able to serve as an important source of information to augment existing mental health supports at services. Without funds and staff support dedicated to purchasing and ensuring successful implementation to the roll out of such a resource, the Commission has not pursued additional information at this time.

### **Explore Confidentiality Protections for Emergency Services Peer Support Teams**

In 2025, [\*H270: An act relating to confidentiality for peer support counseling among emergency service providers\*](#) was introduced. The Commission reviewed and highlighted several concerns with the proposed language. During the reporting year, the Commission focused its energy on this priority. The Commission reviewed related best practices and laws including New , [Florida](#), Best practices resources<sup>23</sup>, and 28 V.S.A. § 127<sup>4</sup> Vermont's law ensuring Department of Correction's peer support program teams with confidentiality protections. The Commission supports expanding this protection to all Emergency Services Sectors.

## **PLANNED COMMISSION ACTIVITIES 2025-2026**

In addition to the ongoing work in the abovementioned areas, the Commission expects to prioritize the following over the next reporting period.

### **Reassess the Level of Awareness and Knowledge of ESP Mental Health Services and Promote Existing and New Resources**

During 2026, the Commission will launch the survey that was developed in 2025. The Commission is seeking participation at the emergency service agency level and front-line provider level across the State to assess the level of awareness and local/regional access to

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<sup>2</sup> [IACP Psychological Services Peer Support Guidelines, 2016](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Best Practices and Professional Standards for Peer Support Counseling Programs for First Responder Agencies: Report to Congress 2024](#)

<sup>4</sup> [28 V.S.A. § 127](#)

mental health resources. The survey results will advance the Commission's mission to identify gaps and strengths in Vermont's system of care for both emergency service providers who have experienced occupation-related stress and trauma.

### **Finalize and Disseminate Occupational Stress Injury Awareness and Prevention curriculum for Providers and Organizations**

Once the occupational stress injury curriculum is complete, the Commission will share this model curriculum with ESP agencies and support the integration of the curriculum into their annual training plans. The goal is to ensure that all ESPs and their department's leadership have the foundational knowledge needed to reduce physiological stress injuries and other mental health conditions.

Additionally, if funding becomes available, the Commission will collaborate with partners to promote training across the state for emergency service agencies and providers. Examples of trainings may include Stress Injury Awareness 101, Suicide Prevention, De-escalation Skills, Stress First Aid, Critical Incident, and Stress Management.

### **Advocate for the Expansion of Confidentiality for Emergency Services Peer Support Teams**

The Commission will continue to advocate for advancing Peer Support services for Emergency Services Providers, by advocating for protecting peer support confidentiality and limiting liability for emergency services peer supporters under the law.

### **Advocate for the Further Expansion of Workers' Compensation Laws to be Inclusive of all ESP Sectors (2024 Report Recommendation)**

The Commission will continue to advocate for the health and wellness of all ESP workers, by advocating for technical changes within the legal definition of an ESP as defined under 21 V.S.A. § 601, so as to ensure equal protections under the law. The Commission continues to explore the current definition of ESP in Vermont and will make recommendations in the future.

### **Develop resources for the identification of trauma-informed culturally competent clinicians for ESP providers and organizations**

Develop a set of resources for identifying "qualified clinician" who is trauma-informed and culturally competent to provide effective treatment of emergency service providers. This resource would support organizations and providers with recommended criteria for identifying a clinician who may be a good fit for serving emergency service providers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission developed the following recommendations, which were informed by presentations by subject matter experts, lived experiences of ESPs, national best practices, and Commission deliberations.

### **Expand the Confidentiality for Peer Support Services for Emergency Service Providers**

The Commission recommends expanding confidentiality protections for peer support services for emergency service providers. Department of Corrections Peer Support teams are already protected under [28 V.S.A. § 127](#); expanding to ensure that all Emergency Service Providers are protected will remove barriers to accessing these critical services following a traumatic event.

### **Expand the Worker's Compensation PTSD Presumption Laws to Include all ESP Sectors (2024 Report Recommendation)**

The Commission continues to recommend that the definition of “rescue and ambulance workers” be expanded to include all ESPs, except those already represented (i.e. law enforcement, firefighters, etc.), so that all sectors represented by the Emergency Service Provider Wellness Commission will be eligible for the same worker protections under 21 V.S.A. § 601.

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