

Illinois Public Pension Fund Association

NEWS

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Mental health program for law enforcement professionals now available to all Illinois Departments

A highly successful mental health and intervention program for law enforcement professionals is now available to all police departments in Illinois.

Saving Blue Lives, a joint venture between the Illinois Public Pension Fund Association (IPPPFA) and Lilly Counseling and Consultation, has assisted more than 500 law enforcement professionals through 20 programs as part of a three-year grant from the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. Now that the successful grant period has concluded, any local police or sheriff's department can bring the Saving Blue Lives program to their community to help the local men and women of law enforcement.

Saving Blue Lives trains law enforcement officers about the risk for PTSD and suicide in the profession and helps to enhance resilience and peer support. The program was developed and presented during the past three years by Dr. Michelle Lilly of Lilly Counseling and Consultation, and Sergeant Shawn Curry from the Peoria Police Department, Vice President of the IPPFA.

“The training occurred during a turbulent time in law enforcement history between the onset of COVID-19 and the civil unrest that heightened in 2020,” Dr. Lilly said. “Over the course of the three years, Sergeant Curry and I witnessed, first hand, the great need for ongoing programming and evaluation for first responder mental health. These efforts are needed now more than ever.”

Sergeant Curry had these observations from the Saving Blue Lives sessions.

“We encountered so much suffering over the past three years, which was complicated by the fact that many officers reported that they either couldn’t find competent providers or had seen providers who really didn’t seem to understand police culture,” Curry said. “When officers have bad experiences with a mental health practitioner who doesn’t understand the culture, it makes them less likely to seek help in the future.”

The partnership between IPPFA and Lilly Counseling and Consultation comes at a critical time for Illinois law enforcement. Public Act 101-0652 enacted by the Illinois General Assembly requires departments to provide a yearly counseling session to all law enforcement officers in the state of Illinois. While this legislation is a powerful first step to de-stigmatize mental health treatment for law enforcement, it represents an additional challenge to departments who are tasked with identifying mental health practitioners who are able to provide sessions for officers, and do so with an understanding of the unique challenges and needs of law enforcement.

Lilly Counseling and Consultation offers a number of services, including customized training on mental health, resilience and stress management; counseling services for first responders and their families; duty-related and fit-for-duty evaluations; and agency assessment and consultation.

“An important start is to ensure that departments do not treat the yearly counseling session as a check-off, but work with qualified and engaged professionals who understand police culture and have demonstrated commitment to the police community,” Dr. Lilly said.

James McNamee is the President of the IPPFA and has been a key force behind the Association’s support for Saving Blue Lives.

“Saving Blue Lives has made a big difference in the lives of those who are sworn to protect and serve us, and who often do so at great personal cost,” McNamee said. “I encourage as many departments as possible to take advantage of this program.”

Departments interested in working with IPPFA and Lilly Counseling and Consultation can contact IPPFA at (630) 784-0406 or visit www.lilly-consulting.com for more information.

The IPPFA was founded in 1985 as a not-for-profit organization whose mandate was to educate public pension fund trustees. In 2009 the IPPFA became the primary education provider for public pension fund trustees in the state of Illinois, and its members manage more than \$18 billion in pension assets for the benefit of 34,000 active and retired participants.

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