



St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners

Office of Public Affairs

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St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners Approve \$500,000 to Provide Mental Health Support for Fire Rescue Personnel

ST. AUGUSTINE, Florida, October 4, 2022 – During the Oct. 4, 2022, regular Board of County Commissioners meeting, commissioners unanimously approved an allocation of \$500,000 from the Fire District Rescue Reserve to provide mental health support for members of St. Johns County Fire Rescue.

District 2 Commissioner, Sarah Arnold, proposed the funding in a heartfelt message to first responders.

"Suicide is the leading cause of death among firefighters and EMTs, and the repeated exposure to trauma provides a direct link to suicide rates among firefighters and EMTs," Commissioner Arnold said during the meeting. "Our men and women in Fire Rescue are in crisis. I am speaking to you today, imploring you not only as a member of this board but as a member of this community whose life has been deeply impacted by mental health struggles and the devastation of suicide."

The approved funding allocation will go toward the contractual establishment of mental health services available 24/7 to Fire Rescue personnel. Services will include professional mental health support in response to critical incidents or long-term exposure to high-stress events.

"Fire Rescue is very thankful for the board's action this morning to secure funding for department mental health services. The resources this program will provide are critical to the health and well-being of our firefighting force. The support of County Administration and the Board of County Commissioners in providing for this program cannot be understated, and for that, the entire Fire Rescue family is grateful," said St. Johns County Fire Rescue Chief Jeffrey Prevatt.

This allocation will also provide funding to hire a Fire Rescue Chaplain who will provide services to personnel daily and respond to critical events for on-scene support. Additionally, the Chaplain will help grow and train the department's peer support team, who is already working to provide necessary peer-to-peer support for department members in need.

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