

Senate Executive Departments and Administration Committee

Ben Mickens 271-1403

SB 423, reestablishing the commission to study the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder in first responders.

Hearing Date: January 21, 2026

Time Opened: 9:25 a.m.

Time Closed: 9:43 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Pearl, McGough, Gannon and Altschiller

Members of the Committee Absent : Senator Reardon

Bill Analysis: This bill reestablishes the commission to study the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder in first responders. The bill adds a member to the commission from the New Hampshire comfort dog community and modifies the duties of the commission.

Sponsors:

Sen. Birdsell

Rep. Soucy

Rep. Moffett

Who supports the bill: Senator Regina Birdsell, Angela Boyle (NH Community Behavioral Health Association), Adam Schmidt (NH Association of Fire Chiefs), Sam Hawkins (NAMI), Russell Conte (DOS), Alan Raff (AFL-CIO), Michaela Janowski, Eric Batchelor, Larry Moquin, Jared O'Connor.

Who opposes the bill: Daniel Richardson

Who is neutral on the bill: None.

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator Regina Birdsell

- This brings back the commission to study PTSD in first responders
- We have been doing work over the last few years, but we need more space to work. This bill would also add comfort dog representatives and there is a request out there to add a community mental health center.
- Through our meetings, a lot came out about peer-programs and how to structure them. There is still work to be done on PTSD, as one example.

Senator Pearl clarified that the committee is asked to add a community mental health center representative.

Senator Birdsell said yes.

Senator McGough asked about adding representatives from the Ambulance Association or the Paramedics Association.

Senator Birdsell said yes but cautioned about the size of the commission.

Senator McGough followed up to ask about the role of the New Hampshire Public Risk Management Exchange and the New Hampshire Association for Justice on this commission.

Senator Birdsell clarified that they help with the insurance and risk management questions when they arise.

Senator Altschiller asked about the trouble getting a quorum with many commissions that have come before ED&A. Could we describe a quorum as 50% + 1 for this committee?

Senator Birdsell said that would be fine, however they have not had any problems reaching a quorum.

Angela Boyle, NH Community Behavioral Health Association

- We are here to support this bill and want to thank Sen. Birdsell for including a representative from our group on this commission.
- The experience we have could be of great value to the commission and we are eager to help. We would ensure the commission has a well-rounded dynamic of PTSD. We could support the commission in identifying effective programming.
- The needs of those who have PTSD and their communities are paramount.

Senator McGough asked what the right balance is between administration and treatment on this commission, regarding membership.

Ms. Boyle said she probably couldn't answer that question for the committee, but the representative from the community mental health center would be properly licensed and will follow up with the Senator.

Sam Hawkins, NAMI

- We are here to support the bill. The commission has done really good work and been very diligent.

Russell Conte, State Police Mental Health Coordinator

- I would like to reiterate the importance of this commission.
- I have done lots of work in mental health, through NAMI, etc.

- What is important about this commission, first, is that the balance is good and we are well rounded.
- We need working people as well as clinicians, so we can point people in the right direction.
- When I started there were no resources for first responders.
- It is important to have working people who can be the bridge to clinicians and treatment.
- This can help in retainment and keeping people on the job, rather than not getting treatment and then being unable to return to work after getting psychological damage.
- Commission has proven its value and built projects from the ground up.
- Comfort dogs are great for first responders in need, as well as public education.

Senator McGough thank you for the work you do, especially as a first responder. Are there enough first responders on the commission?

Mr. Conte said he thinks it's a great mix. The comfort dog representative would likely be a working police officer. The EMS representative would be good too. Mr. Conte wouldn't be opposed to it but the work has really been good so far. This will help us provide better services and build up programs. Senator Birdsell runs a very good group.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition: None.

Neutral Information Presented: None.